

OUR DAILY BREAD

FREDERICK
PHILIP
GROVE



J. Ferrier.

40

Christmas 1928

Ludwig Phil Grove

...e faster, because now they can change the lineup every minute or two if the coach or manager thinks it necessary.

When I had slowed down so much I couldn't play the game any more, refereeing appealed to me because it kept me in touch with the game I liked.

To my mind a hockey referee has about the toughest job anyone could wish on their worst enemy.

In a period of eight years I refereed 313 hockey games. Most of them were easy. The crowd was "riding me" all the time, especially when it was an easy game

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C. P. R. Tunnel

Sometimes the section foreman is caught in the tunnel when a train is coming through, so to prevent any serious consequences to his handcar there are four "refuges" in the tunnel. These consist of alcoves in the wall of the tunnel big enough for a handcar.

About 113,000 cubic yards of earth and rock were excavated from under the city, and about 25,000 cubic yards of concrete was used for tunnel walls, according to Mr. Thomas Martin, C. P. R. resident engineer.

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Tons of Money.

Metallic money of small denomination, minted by the British and French mints for Roumania, to take the place of certain banknotes which became useless following exchange depreciation, have created a new transport problem for the small dealer. A storekeeper recently visited his bank to draw out \$2000. He was handed over twenty-eight sacks of heavy metal, weighing altogether 1500 pounds. While he was hunting for a truck to haul it away, a guard was employed to protect his sacks, which were later moved by a car

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OUR DAILY BREAD



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK . BOSTON . CHICAGO . DALLAS
ATLANTA . SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON . BOMBAY . CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

OUR DAILY BREAD

A NOVEL

BY

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

Hic tua res agitur.

And his sons walked not in his ways.

I Samuel, 8, 3.

TORONTO: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF
CANADA LIMITED, AT ST. MARTIN'S HOUSE

MCMXXVIII

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
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BOOK ONE: THE PASSING OF MRS. ELLIOT

I	FIRST FRUITS ARE HARVESTED	3
II	THE LEAVEN OF SEX IS AT WORK	38
III	HENRIETTA DRIVES A BARGAIN	55
IV	GLADYS COMES HOME	75
V	JOHN ELLIOT BUYS LAND	92
VI	DEATH	107

BOOK TWO: CHAOS

VII	JOHN ELLIOT SELLS LAND	139
VIII	JOHN ELLIOT GOES A-TRAVELLING	159
IX	PETE SAWS WOOD	188
X	FRED PULLS UP HIS STAKES	209
XI	JOHN ELLIOT PONDERES AND WRITES A LETTER	223

BOOK THREE: IN EXILE

XII	JOHN ELLIOT VISITS FAULKNER	263
XIII	JOHN ELLIOT COMPARES TWO OF HIS SONS	297
XIV	JOHN ELLIOT SITS AT A DEATH-BED	320
XV	JOHN ELLIOT PASSES FROM HAND TO HAND	350
XVI	A LAST EMOTION AND A PILGRIMAGE	375



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BOOK ONE

THE PASSING OF MRS. ELLIOT

OUR DAILY BREAD

CHAPTER I

FIRST FRUITS ARE HARVESTED

JOHN ELLIOT SENIOR, fifty-five years old, small, slender, grey of hair and beard, but carrying himself erectly, clad in a grey suit—he despised overalls—was crossing his sloping yard to the barn which stood north-east of the house, higher up on the bare hill-side, separated from the plantations about the dwelling by a dry gully. He was going to hitch a horse to the buggy; for his wife was getting ready to call on Mary, her third-oldest daughter who lived in town.

Halfway up the slope John Elliot stopped and looked back, allowing his troubled eyes to survey the yard and the fields to south and west.

The yard occupied the north-west corner of the homestead. The part surrounding the dwelling was sheltered by young poplar trees planted by Mrs. Elliot some fifteen years ago.

Opposite, across the road—it was still a mere trail—a second yard faced it, enclosed by the straggling, low buildings—stable, granary, shack—of his oldest son's homestead. The farms comprised three hundred and twenty acres each; for east and west of the homesteads, properly speaking, stretched two “pre-

emptions." This was the short-grass country of the new province of Saskatchewan; a half section of land was considered the least on which a farmer could make a living.

In fact, John junior, still only twenty-four years old, had not found even that enough. The spirit of this new west possessed him, craving vast and ever vaster spaces. He had done shallow breaking over large fields; and, garnering, by sheer luck, according to his father, two or three crops in succession, he had first rented, then bought a third quarter. He had hardly done any plowing since. He seeded on stubble land, scratching it, with the disk, into the semblance of a seed-bed. This year, according to his father, he was reaping what he had sown. It was a dry summer; his grain, though it was the end of July, stood no more than three or four inches high, ripe or dried out. Everywhere the brown, drab earth showed, over the bare clay hills, between the thin rows of scraggy, yellow wheat.

In this moment of survey John Elliot senior's eye swept south. In a long "draw" or hollow his own field stretched from west to east. Even there the grain stood none too thickly; but it was two and a half feet high and, though headed, in spite of the unbroken drought of five weeks still green: eighty acres, on a fallowed field.

"You can't fool the land!" John Elliot muttered as he turned and proceeded to the barn.

The mere fact that his son was farming his own land was contrary to his wishes. Six years ago, when John junior had become entitled to file on a homestead,

he had done so against his father's protest who wanted him to remain on his own farm, seeing that it would be his one day. Ever since, his father had been critical and still more morose than was his habit. That his sons-in-law went their own way was in the nature of things; but that his flesh and blood left him was a source of sorrow.

For the last thirty-two years, ever since, on the death of his father whose name had also been John Elliot, he had left the original homestead of the Elliots in the Red River valley in Southern Manitoba, John Elliot senior, a thinker, had lived a life of introspection, dreams, and ideas. He and his young wife had gone to what was then the Territory of Assiniboia, to settle in a country which was like the land of sun-set, bare, naked prairie hills, sun-baked, rain-washed, devoid of all the comforts of even slightly older civilisations, devoid, at the time, even of the consolation of human neighbourhood. Together they had seen the settlement grow: very slowly, almost hesitatingly. Their first task had been, not so much to raise crops as to produce what would ensure them against starvation. They had had some means, though; a few thousand dollars accumulated by careful, painstaking economy. They had built a small, shack-like house to which, through the decades, they had added room after room and a second storey till now, painted grey with green trimmings, it stood the largest and most commodious dwelling of the whole district outside of the towns, holding eight rooms. The barn was a model building of its kind. Not even

an agricultural college would have needed to be ashamed of it. The shed sheltered the best implements which money could buy, kept in a state of repair which ensured them a term of life and usefulness considerably beyond that of the equipment of an average farm. The hen-houses, south-east of the dwelling, were of the open type, their south walls consisting of canvas. The stock kept was pure-bred, home-raised; no beef was ever sold for meat, always for breeding purposes.

John Elliot was a dreamer; but his dreams had a way of coming true. Far more important to him than his dreams of economic prosperity had been his one great dream of family life.

When, thirty years ago, before going west, he had wooed and won that woman of women, his wife, he had done so with one single object in view: that of securing to himself the mother of his children. In the course of these many years twelve of them had arrived. Two had died; ten were living. Four great afflictions had visited him, aging him before his time: a long illness of Mrs. Elliot's, the deaths of those two little beings in infancy, and the fact that Henry, the second oldest of his sons, as he grew up, had mentally remained a child. He had been extraordinarily sober by temperament; and few people except his wife had therefore been able to see how much he had been affected by these disasters. Yet, on the whole, he had not been disappointed in his particular dream; he had succeeded in raising a large family honourably. His living children, in the order of their birth, comprised, first of all, the three oldest daughters, Gladys,

Henrietta, Mary; next John, the oldest son, separated from Mary by an interval of four years—it was at that time that his wife had been ill, after the two unsuccessful births; three more girls, Cathleen, Isabel, Margaret; and finally three boys, Henry, the weak-minded one, Norman, and Arthur, the latter being at present thirteen years old.

As these had grown up—Gladys, the first born, was thirty now—his old dream, that of raising a large family honourably, had been replaced, slowly and imperceptibly, by a new one: that of seeing his children settled about him as the children of the patriarchs of Israel were settled about their fathers. A beginning had been made ten years ago: Mary, the third-oldest girl had been married to Fred Sately, a Manitoba teacher who, however, had shortly after abandoned his profession in order to move west and to go into trade; he was now living in Sedgeby, the small town which, with the coming of the railroad, had sprung up four miles north of the farms. Gladys, the oldest, had, a year later, moved to a homestead sixteen miles north of Sedgeby: there, a young druggist, also from Manitoba, had settled down, admittedly drawn by the desire to take Gladys home into his shack as his wife. John Elliot never knew how this latter connection had been brought about; the demand of Frank Bramley had, to him, come as a complete surprise. It had been different with Fred Sately to whom he had deliberately opened his house, for above all classes of men, even above the farmer, he respected teachers and preachers. Yet, curiously, that admission of Fred Sately into the family circle had, at the time, led to one of

the very few differences of opinion which had, in more than thirty years, arisen between John Elliot and his wife. Mrs. Elliot had objected to him on two grounds: Fred Sately was sixteen years older than Mary; and, according to her, he had been lacking in worldly ambition.

Now, at the present time, in the year 1906, when the second group of girls—Cathleen, Isabel, Margaret—were growing into marriageable age, Cathleen being twenty-two, Margaret nineteen, with Henrietta, the second-oldest of the first group, twenty-nine years of age, still unmarried, a fifth great sorrow was preparing itself: Mrs. Elliot was failing and plainly preparing to leave earthly scenes. Many times, during the last few years, John Elliot had urged her—in few words, for he was a silent man—to let him call in what human knowledge and skill was available; but she, in an unconquerable aversion to physical examinations, had invariably declined. Her illness, little defined, mysterious, hovered over the house like a threat, felt by her children no less than by her husband.

As he went about his work, harnessing and hitching up the old horse, Dolly, which his wife was going to drive, thoughts flitted to and fro in John Elliot's brain: thoughts which, through many repetitions in many years, had become so familiar that they were linked by a sort of automatic association and did not need any longer to be elaborated: a mere adumbration sufficed to add link to link.

As ever, these thoughts concerned his children.

He remembered how, ten years ago, when, one Sunday, at dinner, Fred Sately had been received into the family, he, John Elliot, though he had encouraged the connection, yet had resented it. That broad, quiet man with the hanging, black moustache and the almost bald head, by entering the family circle had seemed to break it. Into all future relations he had seemed to introduce a new, unknown element. John Elliot had felt as if he were asked to assume a responsibility without being fully acquainted with a new factor on which the issues depended. How right he had been! The issues were only now defining themselves. He had, then, defended himself against the foreboding that, by his child, he was being stampeded into a new phase of his life. Now, he was being rushed along an unknown path, by that very man whom he had half encouraged in his suit.

Gladys, the oldest daughter, ten years ago a plump, pretty girl of twenty, and yet even then in many ways the image of her father, had been the next to leave the parental house. She, too, had gone a path not chosen by him, her father, and hardly by herself.

The image of her father! That thought released another train of associations.

Thirty years ago, when Gladys' birth had been imminent, he and his wife had one day spoken of the great mystery involved in the coming of children. To him, John Elliot, his children, still unborn, had seemed to be a re-birth, a re-creation of himself. In them, his ideas and ideals would be multiplied; they would convert that of his dreams into reality which he himself might fall short of realising to

the full. They would be a means of multiplying his own personality.

Yet, as he had felt the slight antagonism in the thought of Martha, his wife, then herself a young girl of only nineteen years, he had come to see that his very thoughts were hers also: she expected her children, still unborn, to be replicas of herself, to accomplish what she had merely aimed at. Her aims had been softer, less stern, more humane than her husband's. Nobody could doubt, nobody who knew her did doubt that she was an incarnation of the peculiarly Christian virtues. As later, one by one, her children had arrived, she had learned to rule her household serenely without seeming herself to count for anything in her scheme of life. She had never quarrelled; she had always observed all the forms prescribed by the church; she had given alms, prayed, kept the sabbath, communed. Yet, till quite lately, she had always remained pleasant; pleasant to look at, in spite of her growing obesity; pleasant to touch; given to the simple joys of the table and the flesh. She had allowed her children to play all sorts of indoor and outdoor games; she had taught them to dance; she had given them freedom beyond her husband's wishes. She had been as worldly as she had been religious.

Thus, when he had realised that her nature was very different from his own—so different that only his great love for her could induce him even to tolerate it—the thought had grown in him that his children must necessarily be a compound of the two parent natures; and slowly, though reluctantly he had

accustomed himself to that idea till he had accepted it. Had he not deliberately chosen his wife because she seemed to be his complement? Because to his dogmatic forthrightness she had added that touch of human blood-heat which he had seemed to lack? Not that, at the time, he would have acknowledged that lack as a defect. He had been, he still was, proud of the preponderance, in him, of brain over impulse. But, in a subtle self-deception, he had told himself that, what he arrived at as the conclusion of a slow process of thought and reasoning, was embedded in her as a natural inclination. She seemed to do instinctively, action coming from the heart, what he chose to do after mature deliberation, his action being dictated by the brain. In the past, it would never have occurred to him to weigh the two things and to assign a superior value to one or the other.

As time had gone by, however, and his children had grown, till they now ranged in age from thirty to thirteen, he did so weigh the two natures; and, though, in articulate thought, he still defended his own, appraising reason above all else, he was at heart very doubtful about the justice of such a verdict. Many trifles flitted up before his mind, examples of how she had been able to exact obedience from the children, by a word, a look, a smile, when all he could extract from them, by commands which were the result of careful thinking, was an evasion of his orders or a concealment of their wishes and of the actions which conformed to their desires.

A strange, new knowledge had come to him. As

they grew up, these children were less and less a continuation of himself; less and less even of a blending of the parent natures. In each of them a third thing had appeared, their individual being, with inclinations and desires which seemed to be without a derivation from himself or his wife; and the strangest thing about it was that these new individual natures differed in each single one of his children. Whence were they? This was the most puzzling thing of all: a thing to which he always reverted. Already, at times, he began to see failure ahead in what his own pensive and contemplative soul had conceived to be the peculiar life work and task of his very existence.

As more and more of the girls grew into womanhood and John, the oldest boy, became a man, John Elliot had often pondered his own youth. Up to the time of his father's death he had known no will of his own. He had had dreams, it is true. But he had subordinated them to the wishes of his parents and the welfare of the parental homestead in Manitoba. And even his own dream—of a farm of his own, a wife, and many children—had been no more than a continuation of the practice of his parents. With them, it had been an instinct followed blindly; with him it had become a conscious vision. He had always felt himself to be continuous with his ancestors.

With anxiety and sinister forebodings he began to see a break in that continuity. Each one of his children urged forward in a separate, distinct direction

with a decided angle between it and the direction in which he, the father, wished to guide them.

As, under the roof of the shed, east of the barn, he hooked the traces of the horse's harness to the irons of the single-tree, he suddenly straightened, a frown on his narrow forehead. One of his hands was worrying his grey beard. The present had taken possession of him again. His wife was going to town, to see Mary who was in trouble.

And once more a memory arose, this time concrete. Whenever man and wife had been worried in the past, they had talked their worries over at night, after they had gone to bed, lying side by side in the dark and speaking in whispers; and whenever Mrs. Elliot wished to make it clear that she considered the point at issue settled, she had turned to him and placed her arm about his shoulders; and, till she withdrew it, that touch had kept him awake in the night, awake but unable to think, and silent. She had done so last night after having declared her intention not to wait for her daughter but go to see her, uncalled.

Was it possible that he might have to live on one day without ever being able to look forward to that touch and the currents flowing from it, through him and her? That touch which held power to free him of all uncertainties?

In the house there was much stir. Mrs. Elliot was getting ready for her drive to town; her preparations were manifold. She would as easily have tried to walk as gone in her working-day clothes.

She had always been plump; but during the last ten years she had grown very stout, excessively so; and she was short of breath. Not often did she leave the farm any longer. Even on the place itself she confined her activities to the front yard and the hen-houses. In the yard, groups of lilac bushes, sheltered by rows of young poplars, protected small shrubs, gooseberries and currants; in the hen-houses, to the south, hundreds of White Leghorns were scratching and feeding themselves to maturity. In both places she sat down on a low stool when she had any work to do; one of her daughters lent her an arm whenever she moved about, in her coming or going.

Of the girls, three were at home. Henrietta, twenty-nine years old, still unmarried, had grown into a family tyrant, good at heart, no doubt, but harsh and bitter, troubled by a goitre which disfigured her throat. Cathleen, round-cheeked, pretty with her twenty-two years full of laughter, was self-contained and confident, for she had been teaching for five years and had made a success of it: she held a first-class teacher's certificate in Manitoba. Isabel, the least good-looking of the younger girls, mannish, with uneven teeth in her large mouth, was without ambition, somewhat dowdy, but always gay, carolling away in unexpected bursts of song no matter how serious the situation might happen to be.

Margaret, the youngest of the second group of girls, had, a few days ago, gone to her first school. The boys had been permitted to take up their sleeping quarters at John's shack, across the road; that

way it was less noisy in the big house. Henry, the half-wit, did most of John's field-work; Norman and Arthur, the two youngest ones, attended classes in town where, as in Margaret's school, holidays came in winter.

The three girls were busy helping their mother to dress. They were in one of the two large front rooms upstairs, the parents' bed-room. In its centre Mrs. Elliot sat enthroned while Cathleen combed her hair, Isabel buttoned her shoes, and Henrietta laid out her dark-grey silks.

Now and then, as she handled the greying tresses of her mother's hair, Cathleen looked out through the window at the straggling yard of her brother's homestead. Her smile showed a shade of pre-occupation.

The fact was that Mr. Ormond who, three years ago, had been principal of Arkwright High School where Cathleen taught had written to her, saying that he was going to spend a few days in Saskatchewan and asking whether he would be welcome if he dropped in at her parents' place. He was teaching in the university now. During her one year's acquaintance with him Mr. Ormond had appeared to her like a being from a different world. This very summer, just before holidays began, he had visited Arkwright "to renew acquaintances" as the Arkwright *Argus* had put it. He had stayed only one day; but in the evening he had come to the tennis court where Cathleen was playing with some girls. Without taking thought of what might be implied in her words, she had issued half an invitation to him. No doubt he had arranged

his holidays in such a way as to take advantage of the hint.

Cathleen had shown his letter to her mother. Her mother had looked at her with a curiously questioning expression; and, seeing her daughter's slow, persistent blush, she had said lightly, "Well, child, why not? We can put him in Margaret's room."

But, once the implication in Mrs. Elliot's look had sunk in, Margaret's room had seemed hardly good enough for this visitor from a different sphere, that of great cities and universities. Cathleen, asking her heart many questions, had insisted on Henrietta's giving up the second large front room which, in the past, she had shared only with Gladys or Mary when they had come home for a visit. In fact, Cathleen had made herself quite unpopular by intimating on various occasions that nothing was good enough for Mr. Ormond. Special preparations had to be made; the house had to be scrubbed—as if it were not scrubbed every week; the curtains must be washed—as if they had not been washed during house-cleaning in spring and hung up on the line every Saturday since; a rug had to be provided for the floor of his room—that rug which Henrietta had wished for during the last ten years; her sisters must watch themselves in their speech so as not to make their everyday mistakes in grammar and pronunciation; her younger brothers must be on their best behaviour; John must cease using words like "jake" for good or fine.

The consequence was that the whole family had, in irritation, jumped to conclusions which, ungrounded

though they were, had made Cathleen's heart beat faster.

Two days ago, John had brought a telegram from town, announcing Mr. Ormond's arrival for the evening of this very day; and Cathleen had coaxed her brother into promising to fetch the visitor in his new democrat.

Then, yesterday, a bomb-shell had fallen into these preoccupations with things which concerned the future.

Rumour, coming through John, asserted that Fred Sately was in financial difficulties. Between Fred and the Elliots there had been a break for some time. His career in Sedgeby had been meteoric. As, with mushroom speed, the little town had sprung from the prairie, Fred had become identified with its expansion, as a merchant and a promoter. People prophesied that Fred "would be a millionaire before he was done." His enterprises were widely ramified and bold enough to dazzle the imagination.

As he rose, Mary had become "distant" to her sisters. When they dressed in cottons, she had dressed in silks; when they worked with their hands and on their knees, she had sat in the parlour, giving orders to hired servants. She had a large house in town and a second house on the farm; for Fred had done what everybody did: he had filed on a homestead and bought a preemption; his place lay halfway between the Elliot farms and town. When John Elliot shook his head and advised caution, Mary spoke loftily; Fred shrugged his shoulders with a contemptuous grunt. "This is a game which one must understand,

the greatest game on earth, making money! This country has a future. I discount it."

Fred had begun with a small furniture store. The business of a general merchant had been added; alongside, an implement shop had sprung up. He had even built a ware-house and bought wheat; but at the right moment he had sold that to an elevator company. Other merchants had moved into town; the place had been incorporated as a village; the rural municipality which was formed had opened its offices there. Meanwhile this man with the black, hanging moustache went about doing nothing, very careful not "to talk big" except to members of his wife's family.

At last the most ambitious of his enterprises had been planned: a huge, cooperative undertaking owned by the farmers, having for its aim the marketing of their produce and the purchase of all their needs, from a bag of salt to a motor car. A local paper was founded, the *Sedgeby Searchlight*, to launch the company under the name of "Farmers Limited." This company absorbed all Fred Sately's previous enterprises; and he drove about the country, selling stock at sixty dollars for a one-hundred-dollar share. He sold them for cash or notes, for horses or cows, for machinery or junk. The company's assets at last were written on its books with six figures. Fred was the president; Mr. Maclean, secretary of the municipality of Prairie Hills, was vice-president; and Mr. Murray, clerk of the county court and of the school district, was secretary-treasurer. The company threatened ruin to all other merchants some of whom were glad enough to sell out. A boosting spirit took

hold of the countryside; the farmers, feeling they "were coming into their own," enlarged their acreage and worked day and night. Seven elevators sprang up in town. Fred Sately was the great man of the district. Everybody believed in him; everybody trusted him; he had vision; the future was his.

Everybody except the Elliots. When Fred called to sell shares, John Elliot senior hedged and evaded; John junior laughed and flatly refused to buy. There was no reason except that they had come to dislike Fred; for they were themselves impressed by the brilliancy of his career, by his plate-glass and mahogany office in town, by his ever more expensive clothes and his fine linen which hung incongruously on his broad peasant shoulders. John was not reticent about his aversion. "There isn't a man in the world," he said, "whom I can stand less than this Fred fellow." And he was abetted in his attitude by his sister Henrietta. Henrietta was rapidly becoming an old maid and apt to disparage any one who did not do as she directed. As a matter of fact, she influenced everybody except Cathleen who, being away from home for the greater part of the year, remained independent.

When, the day before, the first rumour had reached the Elliot household that all was not well with Farmers Limited, Henrietta had triumphed, of course. "I told you so!" And they agreed that she had always predicted Fred would come to a disastrous end.

The thunderbolt had fallen. Nobody knew exactly what had happened. Mr. Murray, the secretary-treasurer, had been arrested. The bonding company

which protected the school funds had entered suit. Rumour had it that Mr. Murray had been released on bail furnished by Mr. Sately; additional rumours said that Mr. Sately himself might be arrested at any time.

"I wish," Henrietta said irritably to Cathleen, "you'd quit eying that yard of John's. It isn't time yet."

Cathleen smiled as she finished her mother's coiffure.

Isabel, who had been squatting on the floor, jumped up, heavily, clumsily, laughed, and pinched Cathleen's arm.

Mrs. Elliot also rose, leaning on Cathleen. Even that small effort deprived her of her breath.

"Children!" she admonished, standing ready to have the voluminous dress slipped over her head.

Henrietta frowned impatiently, "I don't see, mother, why you should go!"

Mrs. Elliot raised troubled eyes. "Mary is as much my child as you are."

"Certainly, mother," Cathleen agreed.

A moment later Mrs. Elliot, supported by Cathleen and Isabel, slowly descended the stairs. Henrietta remained behind, methodically putting the room to order.

In the small hall on the ground floor they halted.

Mrs. Elliot pointed into the dining room which opened to the left. "Isabel, the robe."

Outside, John Elliot was holding the horse.

Cathleen and her mother were alone. Isabel had

picked the robe up and was spreading it over the buggy seat.

"Cathleen," Mrs. Elliot asked, "why does that man come?"

Cathleen flushed. She had thought all that was understood. "I don't know, mother," she said lightly. "To see the country, I suppose."

"Nonsense, child. Do you like him?" Her voice sounded worried. It seemed almost inconsiderate of this stranger to come at such a time.

Cathleen smoothed her white flannel skirt. "I respect him more than any man I know," she said demurely.

Mrs. Elliot sighed. She felt sorry for her daughter who stood there, trembling in every fibre with life and probably expecting her lover. She was on the point of saying something to soften the worried harshness of her words. But Isabel reentered. The moment was gone.

"Ready, mother," Isabel said.

Mrs. Elliot, guided by Cathleen, stepped through the door.

All of them helped her to gain the seat. John Elliot muttered, "Hadn't I better drive?"

"I'd rather go alone, John," she said, panting from the exertion as she spread herself on the cushions.

Isabel covered her knees with a second robe; and the vehicle rolled down to the road and away to the north, the horse trotting till it reached the steep ascent of the hill where it fell into a walk.

As the road wound along over bare hill after hill,

Mrs. Elliot thought of all she knew of the married life of her third-oldest daughter who had been the first to be married.

"My child," she had asked her one day, nearly a year after the wedding, when the Satelys had still been living in the flat above the store, "are you happy?"

Mary had shrugged her shoulders, wearily disengaging herself from her mother's arms. "I don't know."

"Fred is good to you? All that could be expected?"

"I suppose so, mother."

Mrs. Elliot had looked at her, searchingly. She would be a grandmother soon. How could that be? She had still felt so young. Grandmother! How tired that young woman looked who, only a few years ago, had been her own little girl! What had happened?

"Perhaps you had set your expectations too high?"

"No, mother," Mary had said with the same weary voice. "Don't let us talk about it. I'll tell you all in a very few words. We get up in the morning. I make breakfast. He goes out. He comes home for his meals and goes out again. I live in a flat of my own. My husband is my boarder. I might be the housekeeper of a bachelor in town. The only difference is that he comes to my bed at night as if he had a right to be there. I wish I had known!"

Tears had run down Mrs. Elliot's cheeks. "Do you blame me, Mary?"

"Blame you? What for? I have what I wanted."

"Married life is a compromise."

"A compromise means agreement. I live my life, such as it is. He lives his."

"It will be better when the child is born."

"I hope so. Let us talk of other things."

The child had been born, a boy: Mary's child, hardly Fred's. A year later, a second boy; two girls, two more boys; the years had sped.

Mary had lived a quiet life with her children, indifferent to the world. The town had grown.

One day she awoke. She began to use powder and rouge; she ordered expensive dresses; she insisted on a house of her own; then on a larger one. Fred encouraged her. Expense enhanced his credit.

Mrs. Elliot had looked on aghast.

"Fred must be doing well?" she had asked one day.

"I suppose he is," Mary had answered.

Mrs. Elliot had said pointedly, "Many admire him."

"Do they?"

There had been no more children. Between the parental household and Mary the gulf had opened. When one set of furniture had succeeded another in the Sately establishment, each more expensive than the other, Mary had mocked at the unvarying simplicity in her father's house. All this had worried Mrs. Elliot, especially the change in her daughter since she had ceased to bear children. One day she had sounded her.

"Mary, I sometimes wonder whether all is well between your husband and you?"

"What should be wrong?"

"How old is Dusha?" Dusha—Andrew—was the youngest born.

"Three years and two months." Mary had been flippant about it. "I know, mother. No. There won't be any more children."

Mrs. Elliot had looked noncomprehension. "Does Fred . . ."

Mary had laughed. "Fred? It has nothing to do with Fred. I don't want any more. We have settled that once for all. I wish I had been wiser ten years ago. I should not have six. There are ways and means."

"Child!"

Again Mary laughed: a good-natured, superior laugh. "You are innocent, mother. Old-fashioned. The world moves on. You can eat your cake and have it, too."

Of all this Mrs. Elliot thought as she drove to town; and of many other things. She shook her head.

She had not often seen Mary of late. Mary had grown away from her. All children seemed to do so. She resented it but felt unable to remedy matters. Secretly she cried over it; and she blamed the girl. But since she was in trouble, she must go to her; she was her mother.

The town consisted of two streets crossing each other at right angles. Besides, there was the row of elevators along the track. The intersection of the streets was the business centre; their ends formed

the residential quarters. Not a tree or shrub had grown as yet to relieve the monotony of the sky-line.

The third house to the right of Main Street, coming from the south, was the Sately residence: large, pretentious, glaringly new: a huge block on a square foundation, with a roofed-over porch along the west front. The building was painted dark-brown, with corner-boards, doors, window-frames the colour of cream.

The yard, large, roomy, pretentious like the house, holding the neighbourhood at a respectful distance, was enclosed by a picket-fence. But it was not cultivated; it consisted of the same short-grass prairie which formed the road-side.

Behind the house stood a large stable, constructed like a small barn. To the back yard a gate gave access from the lane along the south side of the property.

As Mrs. Elliot turned into this lane, she noticed her son-in-law in the drive-way of the stable, hitching a team of drivers to a buggy.

She thought she saw a smile flitting over his usually impassive face: furtive and cynical. But when he came to open the gate, the attitude of his square-shouldered, deep-chested body and the expression of his sallow, massive features were those of a dutiful deference.

She felt uncomfortable in the presence of this man who was only slightly younger than she. There was even an admixture of repulsion when she returned his greeting by a nod.

He helped her to alight and reached for the lines.

Mary stood in the inner backdoor, looking undisturbed; the slight flush on her pretty face gave her a girlish look. It seemed impossible that she should be the mother of six children.

"My child!"

Breathlessly Mrs. Elliot entered the kitchen which glittered with white enamel and a range of polished grey steel. A hired girl, bashful and apologetic in the older woman's ponderous presence, was busy washing the dinner dishes and cast a furtive glance at her as, leaning on her daughter's arm, she passed into the large dining room which, like the rest of the house, shone with newness.

The door closed. For a second the two women stood fronting each other. They seemed to make sure that all was still in the house, that they were secure from the intrusion of the children.

Then, with a curious sound from her throat, Mary flung her arms about her mother's neck.

"My child! My little girl!"

Mary disengaged herself and led her into the darkened parlor where she sank into a huge, upholstered arm-chair matching the opaque curtains. She herself sat down on a floor-cushion at her mother's feet.

For a moment there was silence.

Then, "It is true, child?"

Mary nodded: a peculiar nod.

"My poor, poor girl!"

Mary lowered her head. "Mother," she whispered, "something has happened at last!"

Mrs. Elliot caught her breath.

Mary stretched her arms in a languid gesture.

She looked seductively fresh and animated in her loose, flowing dress of dark-flowered silk. She had just had a bath; her skin was cool and fragrant.

"I've been waiting for years!" she said, rose, and took a turn through the room.

"Child!" Mrs. Elliot exclaimed. "If rumour speaks true, this may mean disgrace and prosecution."

Mary shrugged her shoulders. "Disgrace!"

Her daughter's smile shocked Mrs. Elliot. Her wide eyes followed the younger woman's movements through the room. A poignant realisation came to her of the distance which separated her from this child whom she had nursed at her breast how long, how short a time ago! Suddenly she seemed to see herself in this girl as she had been at her age: when Isabel had been born, twenty-one years ago: young, slender, active. And now? What was left but self-pity? Mary had turned and was looking at her. Yes, of all her children she was most like her in appearance.

"Mother," Mary said, "I have been a married woman for over ten years. You said once that married life is a compromise. I didn't acknowledge it then. I don't acknowledge it now. Not in the sense in which you meant it. You meant that each has to realise the other; each has to modify his own wishes and actions, his nature even. Did you not?"

Mrs. Elliot nodded.

Mary laughed lightly. "I've thought about it these last few years. I've thought about your own married life. When father spoke to you, even when he was angry, there was still a reserve. You were

you; he was he. Even when we girls were grown up, there was in father's manner to you something left of the lover. How would it have been with you had father been like a steam-roller crushing all over which it passes? Many admire him, you said one day of Fred. What did they admire? The selfish, iron composure with which he pursued his purpose, ignoring the feelings of others. Something has checked him; and you want me not to be glad! A woman cannot be married to any one for ten years and remain unchanged. Least of all I! And less still, I married to Fred Sately. You are astonished to see what has come of it. I don't know whether to laugh or to cry. I am changed. You asked me once whether I blamed you. If you asked me again, I should not say no. I should say, I can't tell."

"Mary! You wanted him! Nobody forced you!"

"No. But who was I? A silly girl. You let me! My own people let me walk into a snare!"

Mrs. Elliot sat and stared. Tears trickled over her almost uncannily smooth cheeks. Her heart ached with a sharp, physical pain. She fell back in her chair, fainting.

When she awoke, she was lying down; her clothes had been loosened, her feet raised to a chair. Mary was applying compresses to her temples.

She lay without stirring as if she were basking in a sense of physical comfort. Then memory returned. She reached for her daughter's hand and drew her down till her head rested on her shoulder.

"Mary," she whispered, "there is room in your parents' house for you and your children."

Mary straightened. "Don't talk, mother. You are ill."

"I am well enough to attend to my children's welfare." And Mrs. Elliot lifted herself to a sitting posture.

"You mean you want me to leave him?"

"After what has happened . . ."

"I took him for better or worse. I am no coward, I hope."

"When poverty comes in through the door, love flies out through the window."

"Love! Mother, I have been alone all through these years. I am not an Elliot for nothing. Would you have left father under similar circumstances?"

"The circumstances could not have arisen."

"Father is human."

"He is upright."

"He may have been merely less tempted, mother."

For several minutes Mrs. Elliot remained silent. There was a gulf . . . But what of it? This girl was her child. With a sudden movement of tenderness she reached once more for Mary's head, drew it down, kissed it, and whispered, "God bless you! We'll hope for his mercy in our afflictions!"

Half an hour after Mrs. Elliot had arrived in town, Fred Sately stopped his horses in front of John Elliot senior's barn.

He was being watched from the grey house at the foot of the hill where Cathleen was getting ready to meet the train. None of the girls went out to welcome the brother-in-law. All three stood at the

window of the small north-east room which Cathleen shared with Isabel.

"So he's found his way here at last, now he's in trouble!" Henrietta said.

Isabel, rarely serious, sighed. "Well, I am sorry for Mary."

"I wonder," Cathleen asked, "is father in the house?"

"No," Henrietta replied. "He's gone over to John's."

Fred Sately was tying his horses to one of the wheels of the wagon which stood in front of the barn. He looked about, entered the stable, and disappeared from view. When he returned, he stood in the broad, unmitigated sunlight of the afternoon, scanning the valley between the bare, untreed hills.

Then, as if he had found what he was looking for, he strode across the back yard, past the house, and to the gate which led to the road.

The girls ran into the front room to watch.

At the door of the low, shed-like stable on their brother's yard, across the road, they discovered their father in conversation with his son. John junior was, as usual, wildly gesticulating while he spoke to his father. The latter stood quiet, self-contained, grey as ever.

Fred Sately reached the gate before it became apparent that he had been observed by the two men on the other farm. Then John Elliot senior turned and descended to the road while John junior violently shrugged his shoulders as if declining to accompany him.

Fred Sately had seen the gesture of the short, stocky, round-shouldered figure at the stable and interpreted it correctly; he waited on the trail.

There, after an interval, the two men met, the younger one nodding, the older one merely shooting a glance at him. A few words were interchanged. John Elliot turned to a stone pile along the fence of his yard and sat down on a boulder. Fred followed him and, raising a foot to one of the stones, leaned an elbow on his knee and spoke, bent over.

Every movement was watched from the window.

"Well," Henrietta broke the silence at last, "thank the Lord! The Elliots do not cater to any Sately!"

Isabel hummed a tune; Cathleen turned back into her own room and went on with her task of dressing.

At the stone pile, a brief and guarded conversation took place.

"How much is needed to straighten your affairs out?" John Elliot asked.

"Three to four thousand dollars."

John Elliot received the information in silence.

"The business is a going concern," Fred went on, with hardly the suggestion of a plea in his voice. "The difficulty is momentary. If I gain a month's time, things will arrange themselves."

"It is hardly an ordinary stringency," John Elliot said. "Lack of funds does not bring arrests in its wake."

"Well," Fred remarked drily. "If you hold me responsible for what Murray does . . ."

"I don't. But you are aware that crooked dealings

on the part of an officer throw suspicion on the whole concern."

"Murray may have lived beyond his means. No uncommon thing these days."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"To whom should I go if not to you?"

"Granting that you may have some claim, there are others to consider."

"I ask for nothing but a loan, without prejudice to any one's prospects."

"Why not go to the bank or mortgage your land?"

"The land is mortgaged. The bank has carried me so far but will not go farther."

John Elliot shot a glance from under his eyebrows. "The bank knows more of your circumstances than I do. If it were a case of helping my daughter and her husband personally, it would be a different matter. But I am to keep a business on its feet of which I know nothing."

"That," Fred said pointedly, "is hardly my fault. I have often asked you and your son to come in with me."

"On that point my son and I are agreed. We are farmers. We wish to stay out of what we consider doubtful enterprises."

"Do you impugn my integrity?"

"Rumour does."

"Listen to rumour!"

"Experience says, where there is smoke, there is fire."

This silenced Fred. He could not pursue the line he had followed without exposing himself to defeat.

Is if such a course had been suggested, he said, "I am willing to let you examine my books."

John Elliot mused. "All right. I shall come to a meeting in town. I want the manager of the bank in Kicking Horse and a representative of the mortgage company to be present. Then I shall decide whether I can do anything or not."

Fred Sately did not at once reply. He had reason to dread an investigation. Yet, the mere presence of a man of John Elliot's standing would be a help. The banker would have the interest of his own institution in view; he would be careful not to allow the case to look hopeless. Once committed, John Elliot would be drawn in more and more deeply. With Elliot behind him, he, Fred, could restore public confidence; and public confidence was all that was needed. The Murray affair? He would wire Mr. Heap, the lawyer in the provincial capital who was handling the case. Even he, having by this time received information about all the ramifications of the situation, would be impressed by the fact that John Elliot had agreed to a meeting.

"Very well. I shall send invitations. What date?"

John Elliot rose. "A week from to-morrow. At ten in the morning. Your office in town."

He accompanied his son-in-law to the gate and stood there, waiting to let him out.

On his way to the buggy, Fred scanned the windows of the house. Henrietta was hostile. Was she watching him? Isabel was under her influence; she had always lived at home. To his surprise he saw

Cathleen stepping back from the window upstairs. Cathleen had no reason to be unfriendly. She had seen more of the world and of life than the rest of the girls; she had set her aims higher. She spent, on her wardrobe, sums which seemed fabulous to Isabel and Henrietta. She should be an ally. Just now he wished to conciliate any Elliot. But the atmosphere of the place seemed to freeze him. He walked through a hostile void.

He untied his horses, climbed into the buggy, and turned. At the gate, he nodded. "So long, then."

John Elliot nodded gravely back.

On his way to town Fred met Norman and Arthur who were coming from school. His impulse to be friendly with any Elliot still persisted; and he drew his horses to a stop.

"Hello!" he said.

Arthur looked at Norman and laughed.

"Hello, Fred," Norman returned the greeting with ingratiating affability, speaking as to one immensely his junior. He stepped up to the team and unhooked the traces of the off horse. The buggy stood in the centre of the road.

Arthur, seeing what he was doing and catching a quick glance of his, went to the other side and did the same thing with the near horse. Their actions looked as if they were premeditated and concerted.

"Well," Norman went on as if what he did were the most natural thing to do under the circumstances, "How are you today, Fred? This was one hot day! I tell you it was hot in school! We've a great new

game. The match game we call it. I must explain that to you one day." Meanwhile he tied the traces securely on the horses' backs, giving directions to his younger brother in a business-like way. "Hold on, there, Art! That won't do. This way. Now, that is better. The neck-yoke next." And he went forward and dropped the tongue of the buggy to the road.

Fred Sately's brow was knitted into a frown. He pushed his expensive hat back from his forehead. At last he spoke angrily. "You hitch those horses up again, do you hear?"

"Sure," Norman said, working furiously while he buckled the breast-straps. Taking his school-bag off his shoulder, he threw it to Arthur and, in a sibilant whisper, gave orders, "Step back. Watch out. Then run."

Meanwhile, with a genial smile, he returned to the dash-board of the buggy and, addressing the horses, broke into action. "Hi, there!" he yelled and, swinging his arms, he dealt each one a resounding slap on the rump. "Get up!"

The next moment he and Arthur were running away as fast as they could.

The horses, taken by surprise, reared and bounded forward. Fred Sately, unwilling to let go of the lines, could save himself from being dragged down head forward only by clearing the dash-board with a desperate leap—a most undignified proceeding when you stare ruin in the face and are in a tragic mood.

The boys admired him from a safe distance.

"I bet you," Norman said, "he is saying a Sunday school lesson."

Arthur was too much convulsed with laughter to make reply.

An hour later John junior drove up to the door of his father's house; his new democrat was drawn by two lean, rangy bronchos.

Short, stocky, round-shouldered, with goggle eyes and an enormous, hanging nether lip in his red, spherical face, he cut a strange figure; for, in spite of his physical handicaps, he had attired himself like a fashionable dandy. On his hands—which, small though they were, formed just now the most conspicuous part of him—he wore lemon-coloured kid gloves; on his feet, patent-leather shoes. His suit was of navy-blue serge; his neck, encased in a high, starched collar with a flamboyant tie. A huge sombrero of soft black felt sat tilted on the bald dome of his head.

Tall and slender, Cathleen came from the house, trim and neat in a fawn-coloured suit. John bent down with a leering grin, rolling his prominent eyes and pushing out his red, hanging nether lip.

"Well, Queenie, am I in style?"

"John!" Cathleen exclaimed half laughing, half indignant, "you are a veritable caricature!"

"Whatever that may be. Don't I look jake? See the gloves? Seven dollars cash without discount. And the sombrero? Jakaloo, Queenie! We'll show the beau from the city that we can dress in the barren hills, too."

"You are incorrigible!" Cathleen said as she climbed to her brother's side.

"Exactly!" John said. "We'll show him! We can hold our own with the best." And, turning to his horses, "Get up, there, you cows, or I'll knock your hearts out!"

From the door, Isabel waved a good-by; on Henrietta's lips—she stood at the window in the dining room—played an ironical smile.

CHAPTER II

THE LEAVEN OF SEX IS AT WORK

IT was between eight and nine o'clock at night, two days later.

In the inky darkness of the stable Isabel was throwing the saddle on the old white horse which her brother John had given her. She wore a divided skirt of dark homespun, a shirt-waist, and a red neckerchief. Her head was covered with a small, battered man's hat of soft brown felt.

Her movements were quick, decisive, energetic like those of a man. Her voice as she spoke to the horse, though subdued, sounded impatient, urgent, almost harsh. Now and then she stepped into the open door and listened into the summer night.

At last she swung herself into the saddle of the curveting horse and grasped its flanks with her knees. The horse, an ancient racer, turned prancing and shot into the star-lit dark. Obeying the bridle, it circled the barn; and when it neared the line-fence, it doubled its pace and took the obstacle like a hurdle; Isabel kept her seat with the skilled ease of the practised horsewoman.

She turned east, climbing the steep, stony hill-side.

On its crest a horseman was waiting, the figure of a centaur: tall, slender, wiry, sitting an only half tamed, bucking broncho. As her eyes became accus-

tomed to the lack of light, she could recognise every detail of his appearance: the coal-black, flowing hair which, parted in the centre, issued to both sides from under the rim of the hat which was negligently pushed back and knocked into many angles; the red neckerchief, tied over the left shoulder, so that its corner flowed out over the right sleeve of his white, collarless shirt; the wiry forearm which held the reins of the unruly mount with a gesture of studied nonchalance; and even the melancholy eyes, coal-black like his hair, which gleamed softly to both sides of a straight nose resembling that of the Praxitelean Hermes. As his horse, excited by Isabel's approach, reared and turned with a throw of its head, the butt of an ancient pistol, stuck into the belt of his trousers, caught and reflected the light of the stars overhead.

Isabel rode straight up to him and, shooting past, touched the rump of his mount with her riding whip.

A hoarse cry sprang from the mouth of the handsome horseman. His heels pinched the broncho's flanks.

Isabel's horse launched itself forward in a stretched gallop; and the two raced down into the hollow between the stark, bare hills, circling John Elliot's crop on the flat. Isabel laughed to herself.

But the horseman was catching up, his broncho being young and better used to the rough going over the prairie. Meanwhile he spoke.

"Doggone it, Is! You took me by surprise. Wait'll I catch you!"

Arrived at the very bottom of the draw, Isabel slowed down, humping her shoulders.

The horseman reached her and, swerving close, jerked her with a powerful lift of his arms clear of the saddle and swept her to his breast.

The horse, now without its rider, instantly fell to cropping the long grass of the slough.

"I've got you, you kitten!" the horseman whispered. "You've led me a bloody chase. You'll make up for it now."

Isabel gasped breathlessly. "Don't, Ken, don't! Be careful!" For he smothered her with kisses.

Kenneth Harvey was the son of the blacksmith in town, of Ontario-Scotch descent, a recent settler on a claim two miles south. He lived in a sod-shack, a small hut built of squares of soil lifted from the prairie. Since, a few years ago, he had arrived from the east, with his parents, he had aimed at reviving in words and acts what he considered to be the true life of the old wild west. His brain being filled with the picturesque descriptions of cowboy life, heard around the fire in lumber camps, he tried to imitate that curious creation of a romantic fancy. With boastful and calculated recklessness he rode unbroken horses, challenged to bucking contests, and declared that he was a "regular son-of-a-gun."

Endowed with a strange, almost Byronic beauty, he had broken many hearts; but when, coming west, he had found a number of unmarried girls in the Elliot household and tried to cast his spells, he had been received with a cool, mocking toleration. The Elliots considered themselves as being of a different class. But rebuffs merely sharpened his appetite.

Henrietta, "a fine figure of a woman," attracted him first; but the cold disdain with which she treated his advances discouraged him. Next he had tried to get up a flirtation with Margaret who, however, parried the bold thrusts of his speech with the shy, careful modesty of unawakened maidenhood. When Cathleen came home, she froze him into a distant, respectful silence. Strange to say, he had at first paid least attention to Isabel who was no homelier than Henrietta and lacked her bold, domineering ways. Nor did he know that Isabel was his champion in the house where everybody else spoke of him with condescension. "A blacksmith," she said, "is every bit as good as a farmer."

John Elliot senior, who happened to hear this remark, turned a cold look on her. "A blacksmith," he said, "may be a gentleman; a farmer is not necessarily one."

Kenneth Harvey's face, with its soft, melancholy, yet fiery eyes, and with the exaggerated pallour of its smooth skin seemed to speak of hidden sorrows, of romantic remorse, perhaps of guilt to be atoned. The love of a virgin would redeem him. Her girl's imagination was at work, building about him a vast structure of romance, making him the hero of the true west. Like his, her mind was tinged by the early literature of the plains. He had never been invited into the house; she had never seen him at table, never heard him in conversation with the men of their kind. Instead, on his way to or from town, he had often stopped in the road and exchanged a few words with whoever happened to be in the yard.

He had always been on horseback where he showed to advantage. And at last he had been struck by the ardent look in Isabel's light-blue eyes.

She had taken to riding in the direction of his homestead, displaying her horsemanship; and one night he had watched for her and joined her as by chance. Ostensibly he was chasing his cattle; for he professed to be a "rancher," not a farmer. They had dismounted and sat down by the road-side, allowing their mounts to graze on the prairie. He had explained that his father held the homestead next his own; there he was building a neat little cottage in which he, Kenneth, was going to live.

A silence had fallen. Then he had spoken boldly. "Doggone it! How about being my girl?"

He had reached for her waist; she had sunk into his arms.

Something of the kind was suspected at home. The girls, and even John, dropped teasing remarks, protesting. "You are lowering yourself!—Ken's a fake!—You went south? How's the cowboy today?—Seen anything of Bucking-Horse Farm?" Isabel had observed a sullen silence. A passion had sprung up to defy the world.

One day, two weeks ago, Kenneth Harvey—who was not a "bad boy" at heart and who, from many little signs, had arrived at the conclusion that, with this girl, there was "nothing doing" except in the regular way—had spoken decisive words.

"You know, Is, I am doggone poor. I've fyled on the homestead; and I've twelve head of cattle. But I need a woman on the place. My old man will help.

We might make it a go if we milked the bloody cows and shipped cream."

"Well, Kenneth," she had replied, rather thrilled than repelled by his coarseness of speech: it was so masculine, "all the settlers are poor. We are young. Life is long."

"It's a go, then, Is? We hook up in the fall?"

"I suppose so," Isabel had whispered, lowering her eyes.

Kenneth and Isabel—she having remounted—rounded her father's field and turned to the north-south road. Beyond the wheat, the hollow between the hills sank away to a slough, dry in rainless summers. Yet grass and semi-aquatic plants grew there so high that even in daytime the riders would have been half concealed. As, through this slough, they approached the trail, they saw, outlined against the starry sky, two figures coming down the hill-side from the south. In an impulse to hide Isabel dismounted again; and Kenneth did likewise.

"It's Cathleen with Mr. Ormond," Isabel whispered, crouching down.

"Who *is* that guy?"

"A professor in the university. Don't talk."

The two figures descended into the draw; the man stopped. "What is that?" he asked, pointing his cane.

"Horses." For the two mounts had at once begun to graze again. They were raising their heads and cocking their ears.

Cathleen and her escort reached the corner of the field. A stone pile, still warm from the sun of the day, offered the usual seats to strollers of the prairie.

"Shall we sit for a moment?" Mr. Ormond's voice, calm, deliberate, well modulated, sounded clear and distinct through the fragrant dark.

"If you wish." Cathleen's outline, white, soft, and slender, looked lovely in the dim light from the stars.

"Miss Elliot . . ." The man fingered his cane. "You can imagine that I did not come to this part of the country without a purpose."

Cathleen sat very still. Her heart pounded. Take me, her bowed head seemed to say.

Mr. Ormond looked up. "You know I left Arkwright because I was called to the university. I have just received word that, in addition, I am to serve on an important government commission."

"I must congratulate you," Cathleen said with a voice which sounded artificially indifferent.

"I wrote at once. Do you remember the evening when I saw you at Arkwright? You said I should be welcome if I came and dropped in at your parents'."

"I remember." She held her breath.

"I wondered, then, whether you could ever think of me in a different way than as your friend?"

There was a silence. "I don't know how I am to understand this."

"Miss Elliot, I ask you to be my wife."

"I don't think," the quick answer came, "I am qualified for that position."

A low, masterful laugh greeted the reply. "Might I ask why that invitation was given?"

Cathleen rose. It was easy to divine the burning blush in her cheeks. Half averted, she spoke, too quickly for concealment of her emotion. "Because, since I had known you, a new ideal of manhood had come to me."

He, too, rose. "Cathleen . . ."

But Cathleen was flitting along the road; he followed.

"Doggone it!" Kenneth Harvey whispered where he and Isabel were hidden in the weeds. "That was slick. I'll tell the world!"

Summer madness was in the air that night.

In the great hollow between the hills warm shadows had gathered as the sun went down in a cloudless sky. The rising dark had obliterated all signs of the toil of the day; nothing remained of it except a fine smell of dust which filled the valley.

In the shelter of the rows of lilac bushes, carefully tended during the past decades, John Elliot and his wife were sitting on two chairs. Without words they conveyed to each other their sense of passing events. The father felt jealous of his daughters: he wanted to guide them, not let them choose for themselves. But instinct told him that, if he interfered, nothing would come of it but dissatisfaction and possibly tragedy.

The children were going their own way; they could not be stopped. He felt as if he had merely en-

countered them by the way-side whence they dispersed in all directions. That third thing which had grown in them, the mysterious addition to the parent natures of which they were compounded, their own individuality, proved more potent every day. Mary and Gladys had gone; Cathleen and Isabel were going. He knew it and felt his impotence to prevent it. "If we don't allow them to pick their own company," his wife had said one day, years ago, "how can they form any attachment?" Without probing things, he had since deferred to his wife.

She, too, felt strangely helpless; as if she could only look on and let matters take their predestined course. The example of two daughters, Gladys and Mary, was like a warning.

In addition to what occupied their thoughts, both felt that they sat in the shadow, not of the hills only, but of coming things, of a great separation.

Nothing needed to be said; things had their own voice proclaiming unalterable decisions. Mrs. Elliot was failing. A terrible thing was at work in her; and the consciousness of it, though imperfectly realised, stood between man and wife like a spectre.

Articulate thoughts were in town, with Mary; or still farther north, on a cheerless homestead where Gladys and Frank were drifting apart; or with the couple on horseback who had not been as unobserved as they imagined; or with the other two who, in the light of the setting sun, had gone south through the haze of dust; or with John over there, in his shack where a light was moving from window to window, for of late he had fallen into the habit of going to

town after dark; or lastly, with Margaret at her first school; or with Henrietta, the lonely girl in the house. Whenever Mrs. Elliot thought of her, she felt overwhelmed with a conviction which had grown through many years that Henrietta was the tragic one of the girls, doomed to live through dark things in her life.

And Henrietta, too, was aware of what was going on. When Isabel had saddled her horse at the stable, Henrietta had stood at the pantry window behind the hall and listened. When Mr. Ormond and Cathleen had taken the south road, like a pair of casual acquaintances, she had stood upstairs and spied upon them as upon a guilty couple. And when, an hour later, John junior entered, in his blue suit, with lemon-coloured gloves on his small, shapely hands, but without the leering smile on his face, she confronted him angrily, asking, "Where are you going in that monkey outfit?"

"To town," he answered mildly, with mock reproach for the violence of her speech. "You know me, sweetheart. The night's astir with love. Where all the world does love, can John alone sit hating?"

"Chase yourself!" Henrietta cried.

"I will, I will, my dear!" And, having found whatever he had come for, he left through the kitchen door.

A few minutes later the creaking of wheels betrayed that he was driving north between the hills.

Henrietta went up into her little room—not hers, but Margaret's! Selfishness had debarred her from

her own. She did not light a lamp. She sat on the edge of her bed, in the dark, and brooded.

She had had a letter from Pete Harrington. For the dozenth time Pete had asked her to be his wife. He was living in Manitoba again, where he had bought land in the hills of the Dusky Mountains. There he was farming, with forty-five acres broken. A living, he said, was assured. In time it would be more than a living. He was lonely and longed for a home of his own. Would she reconsider her former decision?

Henrietta's heart had beaten faster. She had hesitated. But the memory had come back to her of how she had invariably treated this man who looked and dressed like a labourer. Was Cathleen to marry this Mr. Ormond from the city while she, Henrietta, followed in Gladys' footsteps? She had sat down and written her answer, declining.

Of all this she thought as she sat in the dark. Bitterness filled her soul. She clasped her hands to her breasts and gripped them. Was not her body that of a woman? Was not her soul that of a girl?

True, in married life things did not come out as one wished and hoped for. Mary's example was a deterrent. And Gladys, poor Gladys with her desire for comfort and luxury! Living in a two-roomed shack, with a husband who had the soul of a trader and the body of a clerk and yet was condemned to handle horses which he feared and implements which he hated. She had two children and was committed. Life was leading her along a path which she had not chosen except for the fact that she had once on

a time chosen a man, Frank Bramley, the druggist!

No, she, Henrietta, wanted to see what she was going into before she accepted.

Yet, during this night of summer madness, with the soft, dust-smelling air breathing into the room, she had only one desire: to be taken into the arms of some one, to be held tightly, to feel a caressing hand on her head, about her shoulders, along her spine. Life? What else had it to offer? She was getting old.

In the sudden realisation that she was giving in to things which might lead her she knew not where, she rose and shuddered. "The flesh is weak," she said, felt her way to the curtain which closed the door-frame—there were no doors upstairs—and into the hall and down the stairway. Arrived at the foot, she turned to the left, into the large dining room, lighted a lamp, searched on a shelf for a deck of cards, and sat down at the table to play a game of solitaire.

In town, John junior sat in a stall of the Rex Cafe. Opposite him sat a girl.

Small and delicate, she had the fast-fading prettiness of anæmic youth, a prim mouth, and movements of studied refinement. When she raised the spoon, sipping her ice, she bent the little finger of her manicured hand away from the others. And John who watched her with a look of exaggerated infatuation noted critically that that little finger was not quite straight.

"Sure," he said as if he were acting a comedy. "I

am the gentleman of the family. It's a poor family that can't afford one gentleman. I have them all working for me, brothers and sisters."

"Father and mother, too?" she asked with an artificial laugh.

"Oh, father!" And with sudden soberness he added, "No, not mother. You must know, Miss Lillian, that I consider my mother the best woman that ever lived. That is one reason why I should like you to meet her. How about it? Will you come on Sunday? I'll fetch you, sure. I'll fetch you in style. That's what I got my democrat for. I'll come in gala. With my team of bronchos."

"I might," she smiled.

"Jakalool!" he exclaimed, acting the clown. "You know, there are farmers and farmers. My father's one kind, I am the other. Great country this. Tickle the soil with a plow; and it smiles with a crop. If ever I marry . . ." And he laughed at her with a broad laugh, humping his back, drawing his head between his shoulders, and looking up at her with his enormous, light-blue goggle eyes, letting his lower lip hang, thus making capital out of his ugliness.

She, half overcome with this game of mocking admiration, picked the paper napkin up and hit him a playful blow over his half bald head with the yellow wreath of hair. "You are a monkey," she said, "Mr. . . ."

"John," he completed.

"Mr. John, then," she said primly, straightening so as to counteract the effect of her familiarity.

"What I was going to say," he drawled without

changing his ludicrous attitude. "If ever I marry, Miss Lillian—you can take that whichever way you please . . . If ever I marry Miss Lillian,"—this time he spoke the clause without the comma—"my wife is not going to work unless she wants to: she can sit in state. Look at me!" He extended his long, strong arms. "Six years ago I homesteaded with seventeen cents in my pocket; and they were borrowed. I am worth five, six thousand dollars at the lowest valuation, not counting the land which I would not sell for ten thousand cash. There isn't much of a crop this year; we had no rain. But there is credit. I can walk into that there bank in the city and borrow. They'll be tickled to loan me whatever I need."

"I believe you, Sir John," the girl said with a smile and a sidelong glance.

Miss Lillian Flaws was the stenographer in the real-estate office of Mr. Howden; she was twenty-four years old and beginning to realise that she would soon be an old maid unless she was willing to accept what appeared to be the solid comforts of farm-life in lieu of the dreamt-of luxuries of the city. She was the daughter of a poor Ontario parson blessed with six children; and she had, from an early age, been condemned to make her own living. Already she felt that, in order to hold her own by the side of younger girls, she must have recourse to a discreet use of lip-stick and powder; and, though she was not, on principle, averse to such "aids to beauty," she viewed their necessity with alarm.

John Elliot junior had met her at a school picnic. In the bevy of rustic belles she had struck him by her air of exotic refinement. He had singled her out with his attentions; and she, awed by the name of Elliot, much respected in her employer's office, had mildly responded and played an adroit and careful game. People who watched them had said—the male part, “Lucky if he gets her!”—the female part, “It seems a disgrace, the way she is setting her cap for him.”

Out of a flirtation begun in wantonness of spirit a situation had arisen where John's vanity was involved and where, had it been necessary, she might have claimed that he had compromised her and owed reparation.

John was half conscious of this mixture of motives; and he anticipated resistance at home. But that, unless the resistance came from his mother, was rather calculated to egg him on in his course. The affair carried him away just as, when a boy, he had been carried away by his devilries.

At moments, while at work in the field, he was suddenly overcome with a feeling of the seriousness of the matter. He would stop whatever work he was engaged in and cast a wistful glance into the tenebrites of the future. But he was young. The blood coursed hotly through his veins. He had never known any girl with any degree of intimacy; and Lillian was pretty. She had thick tresses of black hair, neatly arranged on her small and delicate head. Her skin had the fine, fragrant smoothness of thin-blooded youth. And once, when she had bent for-

ward, he had, with a thrill, caught sight of budding breasts beneath the filmy edge of her fine waist: she dressed with skill.

At thought of that, he yielded to incomprehensible stirrings and gave vent to them in a burst of coarseness.

"To hell with it all!" he yelled as he stood behind his horses, wiping the sweat from his brow and kicking the dust from a clod. "I am going to marry the chit!"

It was near midnight when he took leave from her in front of her boarding place. Holding the lines of his horses with his left, he reached out with his right for hers and asked once more, "You promise? Sunday? I'll be here at half past two."

"Yes," she said, smiling encouragingly up at him, her face bathed by the light of a street lamp.

Her hand rested in his; from the contact a stream of fire seemed to pass. He drew her to him and kissed her on mouth and eyes.

When he released her, she breathed, "Oh John!"

"That's settled," he said and sprang to the seat of his vehicle; and, with a wave of his disengaged hand, he vanished into the night.

On the face of the girl who gropingly entered the sleeping house lay a curious smile.

That night, in the distant city of Brandon, in Manitoba, a tall, broad man boarded a midnight train going west. He was clad in a dark suit of nondescript colour, with a cap on his tousled, ash-blond hair.

Everything about him betrayed that he placed no value on his appearance.

It was Pete Harrington who, the day before, had received a letter from Henrietta Elliot who refused to be his wife. For twelve years he had courted her. Now that he had bought land and was making his way he felt that he could not go on without a woman on the place. On the farm, a man is only half a man when he has to cook meals and to wash dishes and sweep floors. He had tried to envisage a future with a stranger as his wife. He could not imagine it. There was only one woman. She had refused him by letter: she should once more refuse him by word of mouth or accept him.

Thus, as the second group of the Elliot children grew up, the leaven of sex was at work again, shaping their destinies for a future veiled in darkness.

CHAPTER III

HENRIETTA DRIVES A BARGAIN

ON the afternoon of the following day the three girls were in the kitchen of the grey house, two of them washing the dishes used in an early cup of tea.

Henrietta would not allow Cathleen to do any part of the house work. She insisted on her being treated as a guest. During the last four years Cathleen had repeatedly sent home not inconsiderable sums of money which must have more than repaid her parents for the expense of sending her to high school and to normal. Henrietta felt, therefore, that it was her and Isabel's privilege to do the work in the house—in order, as she sometimes expressed it, to “pay for their keep.”

Thus it was only natural that Cathleen, in her long, starched dress of white batiste, should be sitting on a chair by the window. On her round, pretty face lay a smile. She knew that her secret had somehow betrayed itself to Isabel; but Henrietta was still ignorant of it.

Between Henrietta and her younger sisters and brothers a peculiar relation had defined itself during the last few years. By right of her age she claimed an authority little short of maternal; and they denied and resented it, sometimes laughingly, sometimes in bitter quarrels. But only Cathleen, being absent

from home for ten months of the year, had succeeded in withdrawing herself from its influence.

Isabel was waiting for Cathleen to say something. Living at home, she suffered most from Henrietta's domineering temper. Repeatedly she threw Cathleen an encouraging look; but Cathleen bided her time. Isabel, wild and, in matters of deportment, younger than her years—her mother called her the "humble-bee"—was singularly free of envy. Both she and Henrietta had been impressed with Mr. Ormond's manners, with his courtesy, yes, with his clothes. Cathleen had not failed to awe them with mentioning what she thought was his income; and Henrietta had sneered. Isabel, however, knew that Henrietta would feel "left behind" on hearing the definite news which Cathleen had in store. Though speculation had been rife before Mr. Ormond's arrival, his actual appearance had almost stopped it. He was from a different social plane. Cathleen's engagement to him would "take Henrietta down a notch or two."

The mute play between Cathleen and Isabel became so obvious that Henrietta could not but take notice of it. Her mouth set itself in a straight line. She tried hard not to betray that she was aware of what was going on; but her very air of unconcern, a little too pronounced to be natural, gave her away.

At last Isabel burst into a merry laugh.

Henrietta veered. "What's the matter with you?"

"With me?" Isabel asked indignantly.

Henrietta turned and went to the pantry. Her very step—with the steeply sloping line of her instep—seemed to assert a claim of defeated authority.

When she returned, she stopped in the middle of the kitchen, holding her head high and looking down on the offenders. Her hard, blue-grey eyes glinted.

"You've something up your sleeve. Out with it!"

"We?" Isabel asked innocently.

"Yes. You or your sister."

Cathleen sat smiling. But, lacking Isabel's provocation, she also lacked her cruelty. She rose.

"I don't know," she said, "whether you would call it having something up my sleeve. I did come in here to tell you something which concerns you only as my sister. Isabel knows; though I might say I did not tell her."

Comprehension burst upon Henrietta; much as she tried to disguise it, its effect was obvious.

All her sisters, so it seemed, were finding husbands. She alone remained an old maid. Margaret was still single, it is true; but Margaret, a mere chit of a girl, had had offers and declined them; she had professed her intention never to marry. Margaret, undoubtedly the best-looking one of the Elliot girls, was strangely cool, possessed of curious ideas of independence, filled with an ambition to carve a career for herself: a reader of the most modern literature of Europe: Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Ellen Key, Lagerloeff, Tolstoi, Hamsun. A girl with ideas so perverse had offers, and no despicable ones. Hers, Henrietta's, had all come from the same man, a man who did not measure up to her preconceived ideas of a husband!

That the impending announcement of Cathleen's engagement hit her so hard—when she had just arrived at the conclusion that, after all, nothing of the

kind was to be expected—was owing to the very fact that Mr. Ormond represented the type with whom she herself imagined that she could have fallen in love. To him she would have bowed as a slave; his very mannerisms she would have copied; his views and ways she would have adopted as her own. Inately, she was a climber; and she felt that Cathleen was not; the externals left Cathleen indifferent. Seeing, therefore, her sister grasp the prize, she turned around to disparage it, to find fault with the man, in order to destroy the younger girl's triumph. There was even something like scorn of her sister: never would Cathleen fully appreciate her good fortune; the man was making a mistake; it was she, Henrietta, whom he should have asked!

"You don't need to say a word," she said haughtily. "I know you have accepted him. You are a fool."

Cathleen's soft and radiant features hardened. "A nice way to wish me joy," she said.

"Joy?" Henrietta repeated steelily. "You are marrying out of your sphere. I have never known any good to come from such a match. Wait till you have seen more of life. Besides, he is too old for you."

"Too old?" Cathleen asked with icy mockery. "He is no more than nine years older than I am. And, you may not know yet, he has just been appointed to an important position in the provincial government."

That moment a knock sounded at the kitchen door. Henrietta, on the point of flinging back a sneering

remark, turned with a shrug of her shoulders and opened the door.

A grimy young fellow from town stood on the flag-stone.

"What is it?"

"There's a gentleman in the car," he said, "who asks Miss Henrietta Elliot whether she'd step down to the road for a second." With a grin on his grease-smeared face he looked from one to the other, apparently at a loss for whom the message was meant.

"Miss Henrietta?" she repeated.

"Yes, ma'am."

Blank astonishment on three faces.

Henrietta was the first to recover. With a few quick movements she divested herself of her apron, touched up her hair, and fronted the door.

"Where?"

The young man donned his cap and led the way. The door closed behind them.

Isabel led in the rush upstairs, to the landing between the rooms. Cathleen followed somewhat more slowly.

Carefully Isabel raised the curtain which closed the entrance to the parents' bed-room. Mrs. Elliot was lying down, asleep. They tiptoed to the window. On the road, trembling with the running engine, stood a motor car, headed north; its top was folded down, its wind-shield up. The front seat was empty; in the back seat, a stranger sat, too far away to be recognised.

As the young man reached the road, he promptly

climbed in and took his seat behind the wheel.

Henrietta, her head still high with indignation at her sisters, followed through the open gate.

The stranger raised his cap, leaned over, and spoke. Then he opened the door of the tonneau; and Henrietta, hatless, clad in her slightly faded blue-and-white house dress, climbed in by his side.

The engine roared; the young man threw the clutch in; the car shot away, up the steep, winding trail between the hills which hid the town.

Isabel and Cathleen looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders with an expressive gesture, and tip-toed back into the hall and down the stairs.

When Henrietta reached the road, she recognised, with a quickening of her pulse, Pete Harrington, her decade-long suitor. He looked aged, matured. He must be thirty-three years old. He was not handsome. In a peculiarly long, clean-shaven, deep-lined face his short, thin nose stood awry, giving his features something chaotic, earthy, as of nature in disarray. But he was every inch a man.

"Hennie," he said, "I must speak to you. No, not here nor at the house. Somewhere on top of a hill. I have hired this car for the afternoon. Get in and come along. As soon as I have had my say, I shall take you back. Nobody here needs to know who I am unless you tell them. Your father and John are in the fields. Your younger sisters don't know me."

Henrietta, in a state of trembling agitation, nodded mutely.

She entered the car; and they were climbing the

hill. They had neither shaken hands nor touched. Pete sat in his corner; Henrietta in hers.

Her father's line-fence was left behind. To the right, a section of wild land stretched over the hill; to the left, Fred Sately's preemption.

Henrietta's mind was working fast, thoughts ticking off like heart-beats.

Two miles from the farms, halfway to town, Pete Harrington touched the driver on his back.

"Pull out of the road and stop."

The driver obeyed, manipulating pedals and levers.

Pete opened the door of the tonneau; and, with a short, breathless laugh, Henrietta alighted.

"It may be a few minutes; it may be an hour," Pete said to the driver. "I leave my suitcase in the car."

Then he took the lead, crossing the prairie at right angles to the trail, going east, up the flank of a hill covered with sparse tufts of short, wiry grass interspersed here and there with snowberry brush and mats of prickly cactus. Arrived at the top, where huge boulders were embedded in the parched clay, he stopped. They could see the elevators of the town from here; and to the south, the roof of John Elliot's barn.

"Might as well sit down, Hennie," Pete said.

She did so, choosing a flat stone for her seat.

"I've come to ask once more," he went on. "I know it must seem laughable to you. It is the last time. The point is this. I have reached a stage, on the farm, where I can't remain single. I have made up my mind to marry in any case. If you won't have

me, I must ask another woman. I could not bring myself to do so without making a last attempt."

Henrietta smiled cryptically. "You have chosen the moment well," she said.

He looked down. "What do you mean?"

"Never mind. Nothing that concerns you. Listen, Pete. On certain conditions I'll marry you at once."

He was so surprised that he could but stammer, "What has happened?"

"Never mind," she repeated. "As I said, if you still want me, you can have me; provided you can pay the price."

"If I still want you? Should I be here?"

"Pete," she said softly. "I am no longer the child of ten years ago. I am twenty-nine. I have a goitre. At home they think I am a termagant, a sort of dragon. And yet, Pete, I long to be fondled and caressed."

Pete laughed and looked about. "That driver's watching us. Come down into the hollow. I'll show you whether I can kiss."

Henrietta smiled up at him.

He looked sober again. "You speak of a price."

"Yes," she said bitterly. "Pete, I am not a silly girl. I have seen something of life. If I marry, I shall consider the arrangements as a matter of business. I want to make sure of certain comforts and luxuries before I take the plunge."

"What are the conditions?"

"I want a car."

"I am buying a threshing outfit. I like machinery. Within a few years . . ."

Henrietta shook her head. "No. If you want me, you will have to take me at once, before harvest. I do not intend to stay here through the fall."

"All the better. I need you in harvest."

"Yes. But within two weeks of my arrival at your place I want to drive to town in that car."

Pete was sobered. "What else?"

"I am not going to be without money. I am a good housekeeper. I have practically run father's house for the last eight or ten years. I know how; and at little expense. But over and above my household allowance I want twenty-five dollars a month for myself, to spend on clothes, luxuries, what-not."

"Sounds," Pete said, "as if you were hiring out for wages."

She nodded. "Exactly what I am doing, Pete. This is partly a business deal. I might say that I had almost made up my mind to leave home. I can make a living. I could conduct a boarding house. That is what I was thinking of. I want to be independent. If you hired a housekeeper, you would not dream of leaving the question of wages in suspense. If you marry me, you do hire a housekeeper; and you get a wife into the bargain. You may think it would have been nicer if I had sunk into your arms. It seems mercenary to you."

"No," said Pete. "Perhaps there is something to be said for your way of looking at it."

"Well," Henrietta said encouragingly, "at least I am never going to come to you begging for money. I shall have my own funds."

Pete laughed. It sounded a trifle forced. "Yes.

But, Hennie, you know, a farmer does not always have the cash."

"He can if he sees to it. You are buying a threshing outfit. No doubt you have promised definite yearly payments. Well, I ask you to promise me three hundred dollars a year, the money to be mine, never to be asked for, never to be enquired about, how it is spent and what for. Put it aside in the fall, when you thresh."

Pete brooded. "Hennie," he said, "all this somehow does not seem quite right. Marriage is a partnership."

"Marriage," Henrietta objected, "is mostly slavery."

"I'd promise almost anything—seeing you so near—within my grasp. The farm is almost bound to be a success."

She leaned back, supporting herself on one hand, and smiled up at him. Her face was flushed. The hard red of her cheeks was lost in that suffusion. "Pete, if you want me to, I'll go down with you into that hollow . . ."

"Come," he cried, his huge body shaken as by an earthquake. "Have it your way. As for the car, I'll pay for it out of the wood I saw in winter."

Half hidden by the snowberry brush which grew densely in the draw, she lay in his arms; and kisses rained down on her face, hard, eager kisses; and great, calloused hands played havoc with her hair, so that it came undone, falling about her head and shoulders.

"Pete," she whispered, "Pete!"

She looked almost pretty in her disarray; and he, flushed and victorious, looked almost handsome to her suddenly enamoured eyes; he was strong and manly.

"Pete," she cried, "am I an old maid?"

"A maid," he said brusquely. "But old? Who says so?"

An hour went by; the sun was sinking to the west.

On top of the hill a slim figure appeared, spying curiously down into the hollow.

"Pete!" Henrietta sprang up in dismay. "That fellow sees us."

"Let him!" Pete laughed. "Let the world see us!"

"Listen," she said as they went to the road. "We'll drive back to within half a mile of home. Then I get out and walk. It's time to get supper. You turn west this side of John's. Go to his shack across the field. When I ring the gong, you come over with John. I won't say a word. We'll surprise them."

"Sure," he agreed. "Anything you say."

The driver received them with an open grin. "The two kids came by," he said to Henrietta. "Your brothers, miss. They crawled all over and under the car and asked all kinds of questions."

"You did not tell them, I hope?"

"You bet I didn't."

Henrietta entered the kitchen and, ignoring her mother's astonished and questioning look, at once proceeded with the preparations for supper.

Cathleen and Mr. Ormond were in the small "music

room" which was accessible only from the dining room and which owed its name to the fact that it held an organ.

A few minutes after Henrietta's return, Isabel burst into the kitchen and stood arrested.

"Where have you been all this while?" she asked, less reluctant to plunge into words than her mother.

"I?" Henrietta replied frigidly. "Out for a walk."

"Where to?"

"Over the hills."

"Who was that stranger in the car?"

"None of your concern," Henrietta said; but, catching her mother's reproachful look, she added tantalisingly, "All things come to him who waits."

While, in the half-dusk of the kitchen from which the steep slope of the hill-side excluded much light, the preparations for supper went on, John Elliot senior was seen to appear in the yard, leading his six-horse team. He had been disking his summer-fallow on the preemption, east of the homestead.

At the barn, Norman joined him shortly to take the horses from him and to lead them down to the well at the deepest point of the hollow between the two farms.

Then Mr. Ormond was seen to stride over and to greet him pleasantly. The guest was dressed in a pair of light-grey trousers, well fitting, sharply creased; his upper body was coatless; his white, blue-striped shirt as always immaculate. On his square, heavy head a sailor hat was tilted at an angle.

John Elliot, grey, dusty from the field, sat down on the tongue of a wagon where his guest joined him. The two conversed.

When Norman returned with the horses, John Elliot rose and gave him a few instructions, pointing. The boy proceeded to undo the lines. The two men came to the house.

Contrary to his custom, John Elliot went to the front; a moment later he looked through the door which connected kitchen and dining room, nodding to his wife who still sat on the chair in the corner.

"Martha," he said and offered his arm.

The door closed behind them.

"I believe," Isabel whispered, "he is going to ask them."

"Very likely." Henrietta was unconcerned.

Feeling repulsed, Isabel could not deny herself the satisfaction of what, in the family jargon, was known as a "dig." "There will be two weddings from this house in fall," she said.

"No. There will be three, at least."

Isabel looked up.

"Provided," Henrietta went on, "that, against the wish of your family, you marry the blacksmith."

That silenced Isabel.

It was her usual task to set the table. But, when she prepared to do so, Henrietta, who was lighting a lamp, turned and said, "You watch the potatoes. Slice that ham. When you hear the first gong, break these eggs into the pan. I am going to set the table myself."

"All right," Isabel drawled as if she were not hurt in the least. "You are the doctor."

Henrietta went into the dining room, taking note of the fact that the door to the music room was

closed. Her parents were closeted with Cathleen and Mr. Ormond.

She pulled the extension table out to its full length, spread the cloth, and laid it for eleven.

The first gong had sounded.

John Elliot went into the kitchen to wash; Cathleen and Mr. Ormond slipped upstairs. Henry, Norman, and Arthur filed into the dining room. Mrs. Elliot was still sitting in the music room, solemnity on her pain-drawn face.

Henrietta entered, carrying a platter heaped with date-filled biscuits.

"Arthur," she said to her youngest brother, "I want you for once to behave and not to be greedy. Don't you dare to take any cookies unless I give you one."

Arthur grinned and looked at Norman who, unable to suppress his vitality, was humming a tune and dancing a jig.

"John isn't here yet?"

"No," Norman said. "I'll get him, shall I?" And with exaggerated obsequence he jumped toward the door.

"You stay where you are!" Henrietta commanded.

The second gong was sounded.

The dining room filled. Cathleen came on Mr. Ormond's arm. John Elliot took his place behind the chair at the upper end of the table; his wife, hers at the lower end. Henrietta assumed command and assigned a seat to each of the others. Three seats remained vacant; she took the central one.

"Who set the table?" Mrs. Elliot asked.

"I," Henrietta replied casually. "We won't wait for John."

"There is one cover to spare."

"John is bringing a friend."

John Elliot cleared his throat. All voices ceased while he asked the blessing. Then he reached for the Bible and read a passage from Mark iv. Chairs scraped over the floor; and all sat down.

During the momentary confusion which followed, John's entrance escaped observation. Behind him, Pete's tall figure loomed, half lost in shadows.

"Hello," John said. "I don't know whether this gentleman is known to the company?"

All heads turned. Pete bowed awkwardly.

Nobody except Henrietta had seen him within ten years. The younger generation of the Elliot children had never known him except by sight. The light of the lamp hanging over the centre of the table gave his embarrassed smile and crooked nose something almost Satanic.

Again Henrietta took command. One would have thought that she was angry when she attended to the formalities of introduction.

"Certainly, Pete," John Elliot said. "I remember you perfectly. How are the parents?"

"Pete Harrington of the Arkwright Harringtons?" Mrs. Elliot asked, shaking hands.

The girls and the two youngest boys bowed. Henry stared. But Mr. Ormond, with a quick look from man to girl, extended his hand and shook that of the new guest with hearty pressure.

"You sit here, Pete." Henrietta drew out the chair at her left.

Isabel, bending forward, sought Cathleen's eye with a significant wink.

Then the meat was passed, relieving the tension. Mrs. Elliot, further to put Pete and Henrietta at ease—she divined what had happened—addressed a question to the young man; and small talk started.

Henrietta, satisfied with the sensation she had caused, ruled the table, keeping an eye on the boys.

At last Isabel rose to fetch the tea. The conversation broke up into smaller groups. Cake and biscuits were passed around.

Arthur, horror in his eye, followed the platters on their circuit. He was inordinately fond of date biscuits; but so, it seemed, was everybody else; they dwindled; he squirmed in his seat. At last, when the platter reached Henrietta, he could not contain himself.

"Hennie," he cried, a dead silence falling around the table, "a cookie, quick! Before they're all gone."

Henrietta's look was charged to annihilate. But, fortunately for the boy, Mr. Ormond grasped the meaning of the situation and burst out laughing.

That laughter enlightened the rest; and, John Elliot senior joining in it, it became general.

Arthur laughed more boisterously than any one else, casting a grateful look on Mr. Ormond who bent over and whispered to him, "You better clear out after supper, young man; or you'll get it!"

When the company settled down to the dessert, John Elliot senior cleared his throat once more and

tinkled his spoon gently against the rim of his cup. Silence fell.

"My dear children," he said, "there will perhaps not be many meals at which such a number of you will assemble around this board. Another one of your sisters is going to leave us and to follow her chosen husband. I ask you all to welcome Woodrow Ormond as a brother-in-law. He and Cathleen are to be married before the end of the month of August."

Another silence. Then, with a renewed scraping of chairs over the floor, everybody rose, glass in hand, to file past the couple and to congratulate.

Henrietta frowned. She was thinking fast. Her mother was failing. Should Isabel be the next to announce her betrothal, the odium of leaving that mother of theirs alone would fall on her. She threw Pete a quick look and took his arm.

"This," she said, dominating the standing assembly into attention, "is very irregular. Father and mother, I must ask your forgiveness. Pete and I have at last made up our minds. We, too, ask for your blessing. Harvest is coming. We cannot lose time. Let that excuse us."

She had succeeded in centering attention on herself.

Mrs. Elliot sat down, tears in her eyes. Her heart's desire was fulfilled. Henrietta, the tragic one of her children . . .

"Come here, my child," she said.

Her sight filled Henrietta with remorse. She had been intent only on breaking what appeared to her

as the insolence of her sisters. With a few quick steps, drawing Pete along, she arrived in front of the mother whom perhaps she had wounded and who sat there, taking quick breaths and white as a sheet.

"Mother," she whispered, "I am sorry."

"No," Mrs. Elliot whispered back as she bent over her kneeling child and stroked her hair, "it is joy! I had been worried about you for years. Pete," she added, "look after her, will you? She needs it."

"Well-l-l," John junior trumpeted, "ladies and gentlemen, how would it be if we resumed the interrupted procession? I am reliably informed, by the way, that there will be another such party shortly." And he pinched Isabel's arm.

"John!" she whispered, "that is not fair! There is nobody left to get married but me!"

"What?" he whispered back. "Do only girls marry?"

John Elliot found his way to the side of his wife; and while all others clinked glasses, Norman and Arthur slipped out of the room, unobserved.

"Let's celebrate, too," Norman whispered.

"How?" Arthur asked.

"The cellar!"

They left the house through the front door. Arthur took his stand at the cellar window on the north side. Norman quickly and furtively reentered the house through the kitchen, picked up a small pail which he filled with water and a second one, empty, and tiptoed down the cellar steps.

There, he unscrewed two sealers filled with straw-

berry preserves, poured the syrup into the empty pail, replaced it with water from the other, and handed both through the window to his accomplice.

Then, listening at the cellar door, he slipped out again, with the agility of a cat, and joined his brother. They retired to the barn.

Arthur was first to have a taste of the stolen goods.

He curled his lips in disgust—a gesture lost on his brother in the darkness. But his exclamation was not. “Ex!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Thin!”

“Eh?”

“Thin. I’ll tell what you’ve done. You’ve got hold of a jar that had been emptied already!”

“Gosh!” Norman groaned. “That may be. It was dark.”

At the house, Mrs. Elliot retired to her room.

John Elliot senior followed her. “Anything we can do?”

“No. I need rest, that is all. But, John . . .”

“Yes?”

“I want Gladys!”

“I’ll go for her in the morning.”

“Yes.” She sank back on her bed. “And, John! Ask the children to sing.”

“I will. You are sure there is nothing . . .”

“Nothing. I want to lie down. But I should like so much to hear them sing.”

Without a further word John Elliot returned downstairs. He called his son John and took him aside.

A few minutes later John junior had reassembled the family in the dining room and was handing out hymn books.

They arranged themselves into two groups, the three girls in one, the men and the boys in the other. Henry sat apathetic in a chair between the two. John Elliot senior stood in the recess of the huge bay window at the south end of the room.

And, clear as crystal, their voices rang through the house as they sang their mother's favourite hymn, "Nearer, my God, to thee."

In the eye of the man at the threshold of old age who stood, unobserved, behind the curtains of the window trembled a tear. Never before had he felt so much of that dependence on a being outside of himself as now when he viewed in his mind the contrast of the youth that was singing here and the lonely woman who lay upstairs, composing herself to leave this earthly scene. In the strains of the hymn doubt seemed to dissolve; and certainty seemed to descend from above. If only he could hold on to that certainty, never to let go of it again! And yet, in town, there lived another girl, once part of this group, now divided from them by a gulf. And on a farm, some twenty miles north, there lived another. Would these, also, be divided ere long? Two more were going out on paths of their own. What was in store for them? Perhaps it was good that the woman upstairs was not going to view the things that were coming? But he?

CHAPTER IV

GLADYS COMES HOME

NEXT morning, Saturday, John Elliot senior went over to his son's place at an early hour before breakfast. Mrs. Elliot had announced a wish to remain in bed. Nobody else had stirred as yet in the house.

He found John at the stable feeding his horses. Norman, whose task it was to feed those of his father, was washing in front of the shack, sleepy, yawning, shivering in the dawn of the day.

John, carrying a huge forkful of slough-hay, stopped and greeted. Then he asked, "Anything you want?"

"Yes. Are you going to use your democrat? I promised your mother to fetch Gladys over."

"Sure. Anything wrong?"

"Well, your mother, you know."

"Yes. Want the bronchos?"

"No. I'll take my own drivers."

"Slow work," John junior said. "As for the democrat, of course. I'll go if you want me to."

"No, you need your time. The summer-fallow . . ."

"The summerfallow be hanged! But, just as you say. By the way." And he dropped the hay to the ground and leaned on the handle of the fork.

His father frowned. John junior knew the reason

well. The older man would not have dropped the hay. Hay was scarce; some of it would be wasted. There was friction, unexpressed, between the two about such trifles.

"Well?"

"Yea," John drawled absent-mindedly, hitching the suspenders of his overalls up on his shoulders. "I'll tell you. I, too, intend to get married."

"Eh?" His father drew his eyebrows up. "To whom?"

"Girl in town," John answered lightly. "Miss Lillian Flaws, daughter of a Presbyterian parson, stenographer in Howden's office. I was going to fetch her up to-morrow. I wonder, had I better wait?"

His father mused. "I don't know. I don't know."

John felt uncomfortable. To escape the feeling, he went on, "You're aware, of course, that Isabel . . ."

"Yes," his father said quickly, "the blacksmith's son."

"What's it matter?" John exclaimed. "What's it matter? Ken's a decent sort, I believe. Not much education, I know. But neither have I. It don't make me unhappy."

"We shall see," his father said curtly. He looked through his son's artifice. They were all allied.

"There might be four weddings from the house in fall."

"Well, tell Norman about the democrat."

"I'll hitch up myself," John junior said, gathering the hay. "Dolly and Prince, I suppose?"

"Yes." John Elliot turned away.

Having taken an early breakfast prepared by Isabel, John Elliot sat on the driver's seat of the democrat which was drawn by two old horses.

Four weddings from the house this fall!

As for Isabel, her sisters and brothers had done all that could be done to dissuade her from the match. He could only shrug his shoulders. His children were growing beyond his control.

His view of the family was patriarchal. He had a feeling that his sons and daughters-in-law should be picked by himself. Out of six he had picked a single one: by giving him, ten years ago, unrestricted access to his house: Fred Sately. He thought of the fact that his wife had half objected to him on the ground that he was lacking in worldly ambition. In that point at least Fred Sately had surprised them all. It was not ambition he was lacking in. If anything, he had too much of it. The others had picked for themselves. If things went wrong, it was not he who was to blame.

Pete Harrington, yes, he was a man after his heart: a worker, with one aim: to stand on his land as his own master. Yet he had found out last night that even he was in debt, paying off small sums each year on land and equipment. He, John Elliot, had never been in debt. Assume a debt, and you are a slave. Your creditor owns, not only part of your tools and your crops, but part of your labour and time, part of yourself!

Woodrow Ormond, a sensible man, mature beyond his years! But unanchored in the soil.

During the last ten years, more than ever before—

perhaps through his reaction to the career of Fred Sately—John Elliot had come to view all occupations except that of the farmer with suspicion. A granary full of grain; a barn full of stock, with a loft lined with fodder, sheaves or hay: such was his idea of wealth. He had never, of late, sold his crop in the fall. He sold half of it during the winter, half of the remainder in summer; and the balance only after the next crop was garnered. Ormond might have money; his salary amounted to three thousand dollars a year; and his salary was only part of his income. Yet a mere money income seemed very insecure to John Elliot; and he respected only one thing on earth: security; for he had only one ideal; and that ideal was a large family.

He had had many a talk about these things with his son John. When John, against his protest, had filed on his homestead, his father had offered to loan him the horses and implements with which to work his land. John had declined and had bought what he needed. He was for ever driving about the country, in winter and on rainy days, hunting for opportunities to trade. Not one of his horses remained in his barn for a year. Before it had had time to get used to him as its master, he traded it off. His father could not deny that John showed judgment and skill in trading. He boasted that one day, when his father had done no more than disked twenty acres, he had made four hundred dollars clear profit by skilful deals. But in trading luck changes. John Elliot senior believed in raising his horses and keeping them on the farm. Just as, having once located on a piece

of land, he would never sell it. The trouble was, the young generation would not listen.

Many said that in this district of Saskatchewan nobody could make a living on the farm. People moved in and out. Even John spoke of the possibility of leaving the neighbourhood.

In anger John Elliot senior had refused to listen to such talk. "Of course," he had said, "you can't fool the land. No matter where you are, you have to study your soil. Summerfallow gets the rains of two seasons and holds them. Whenever you seed a crop, seed a fallow. Stubble yields one year and dries out the next. If you know it, why do you seed it? It's a gamble, no more."

"Yea," John junior had drawled in reply. "But I like to gamble. If I win, the winnings are big. If I lose, I have credit to carry me. What we need, is a boom. In a boom I'd sell out."

"And buy in the boom as well! Assume a debt when money is cheap and pay back when money is dear! A disastrous business! Whoever tries to beat the game in a boom, gives the devil a hold on his shoulder!"

From these memories—as John Elliot drove through the still sleeping town of Sedgeby, across the track, west of the seven elevators, and north again, over now more level land, his mind turned to other things. He thought of his household and of the principles guiding him and his wife in its management. They bought nothing but what could not be raised on the farm. Yet, if at any time twenty guests had arrived at his place, they would have been fed

without a flurry: no need to have the store around the corner! In his house there was plenty. Yet he owned a few good, safe bonds; and he had a margin of cash in the bank.

John often went to the nearby little city; but never without buying all sorts of knick-knacks: collars and ties for himself; shawls and ribbons for the girls; a few tins of lobster or shrimps for the table. John had always money in his pocket; but it did not stay there long. What did John need three, four suits of clothes for, at forty, fifty dollars each? He, John Elliot, had one Sunday suit, of black broadcloth, for which he had paid forty dollars fifteen years ago. Apart from that he had his grey everyday suits at twenty-five dollars; they lasted him two or three years. Clothes! A man like Ormond might need them: his appearance probably was an element of his success; and he was in a position to take care of them. But a farmer? A farmer could afford to look down on those who needed to groom themselves.

And Frank, Gladys' husband! A quiet, unassuming man he had seemed to be! But he had a mortgage on his place now, a thousand dollars! And he owed money besides. It was well known in the family that Gladys and he were none too happy together. Gladys, once a plump, gay little girl, had become thin and sharp-featured. Repeatedly Frank had come to his father-in-law for help and had received it. Yet John Elliot had scruples about giving such help. He thought of the time when he would be no more. If his children did not learn to make their daily bread

while he lived, what would happen after his death? Death came on apace.

John Elliot had told Frank that he was drifting toward tenancy. But Frank had not heeded the warning. Hence a coolness had arisen between the two families. Gladys had no longer come home as she had used to do for weeks at a stretch in the past.

John Elliot did not like his present task of asking her to come. But his wife was ill, mysteriously ill. Every whim of hers had to be indulged.

He drove on, quiet, grey, nodding here and there to a farmer in a field.

What was wrong with the younger generation? They were "high-fliers." They looked to the externals and wanted to outdo each other in expense. Distinction? Was distinction gained by outspending others? Distinction consisted in minding one's business and never spending beyond one's means!

For more than two hours he drove north, between stretches of flat, treeless, wild prairie and occasional fenced and tilled fields.

Then, in a seemingly greener flat, far ahead, within view of the bush fringe skirting the South Saskatchewan River, low, scattered buildings came in sight: the homestead where Frank and Gladys lived.

As he approached, he scanned the field, looking for Frank whom he discovered at last, plowing north of the yard. He drove past the farmstead and, having caught up with the plowman, drew his horses in.

Frank Bramley was at the far end of his fallow and turned. He did not hurry as he caught sight of

his early caller. John Elliot watched him as he approached.

Frank was of medium height, slender, though wiry. His head was narrow, as if compressed from both sides. The features of his face were finely cut, thin, expressive; his eyes, protected by large, horn-rimmed spectacles of smoked glass. He was thirty-two years old; but his hair was as grey as his father-in-law's.

While he watched, John Elliot's thought was busy. He tried to find a word which would characterise the peculiar quality of Frank's appearance. The movements of the man were slow; even his voice, when he called to the horses, was slow; the very step of the beasts seemed to be influenced by that voice.

John Elliot jerked his head. As always, he was sitting bolt-upright on his seat without touching its back with his shoulder-blades. His lips moved, soundlessly forming the shell of a word. "Dispirited!" his mind said through that motion of the lips. "Like everything else about the place."

Frank recognised him and flashed a smile which showed gold-filled teeth. Down to that wan flash of gold John Elliot disliked what he saw.

Then, morosely, he nodded in answer.

A moment later Frank stopped his horses, dismounted, and came across the margin of the field.

"Summerfallow?" John Elliot asked.

"Yes," Frank said, feeling the irony. "A bit late, is it?"

"Hardly worth while. You turn what little moisture there is to the air. That needs to be done before the rains. Well . . ."

A far-away look came into the other's eyes, obliterating the smile. For a moment the two men, both grey, but one of them young, the other past middle age, looked at each other with hardly veiled antagonism.

"I came for Gladys," John Elliot said. "Her mother asked for her; she is not well."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Serious?" John Elliot repeated with a touch of contempt. "Serious? No. It is only the beginning of the end."

The other's jaw dropped. He straightened himself with a shudder. "All right. Better go to the house. Tell her to send Norah to the field. She'll have to take the baby. It'll be for a few days only? All right."

John Elliot nodded. "Can I go along the fence?"

"Yes. It's rough. But it's dry. Dry as the field."

"How's the crop?"

"There is none. I'll cut with the mower, for feed."

John Elliot turned into the yard, looking disapprovingly, as he had so often done, at the single-boarded stable full of knot-holes; at the doorless out-building leaning at a dangerous angle; and at the shed-like shack which served for a dwelling. The buildings were unpainted, weather-beaten, grey. What with the dry, parched prairie all about and no other farmstead in sight, it was the picture of desolation. Yet, from a distance, the flat had looked greener than

the desert-like stretch north of town: there had been rain here when the rest of the district had gone entirely without it.

He tied his horses to a fence-post.

As he stood on the door-slab, he heard a crooning voice inside. Then he knocked.

The door opened; and a thin little woman stood on the threshold, clad in a pink-striped gingham dress. She, too, looked dispirited, in spite of her neat tidiness and the remains of beauty in her face.

"It's you, father, is it?" she said without a smile. "Come in. How is mother?"

"Mother's failing. That's what I come for. She wants you."

He had entered. The inside of the shack showed a marked contrast to its outside. In the kitchen stood a good cooking range; above it, shining tin vessels hung on the wall. A huge dining table was covered with a centre-piece of crochet and drawn-work. Snow-white, starched muslin curtains clothed the windows. In the adjoining bed-room, the door standing open, the available space was crowded with furniture: a wide bed; a second one, narrower; a crib; a dresser; a wash-stand; a library table; and several shelves running along the wall. Whatever offered a level surface, was hidden under white scarfs of painstakingly executed fancy-work. It looked quite cheering.

But, as John Elliot nodded to the dark and serious-eyed girl of eight or nine, large for her age, his dejected mood returned. He looked about for the boy, a little over a year old, and discovered him sitting

on the floor and staring at him. Ah, these were no children!

"Well," Gladys said, "I suppose Frank can bach it for a day or so."

"I spoke to him. He says to send Norah to the field and to take the baby."

"All right. You stay for dinner?"

"No," he said brusquely. "I want to get home."

Gladys did not reply. Her father was her father. She had never yet contradicted him and was not going to do so now. He knew what he wanted. She attended in haste to what had to be attended to before leaving.

"Norah," she said to the girl, "you tell your daddy the soup is in the range. All he needs to do is light the fire and heat it. There is bread in the big crock in the cellar. A good thing I baked yesterday. There is some ham left. Be a good girl. Now kiss me and go."

All this was said without a smile, with a wistful look of the eyes.

The girl complied in the same, quiet way. "Good-by, grandfather," she curtsied and ran off.

The democrat was rolling south. Neither father nor daughter spoke. But the young woman, holding her baby on her knees, sat up whenever they passed a tilled field—which happened every three or four miles.

At last she said, "No crop anywhere!"

"I have a crop," her father replied briefly.

When they had crossed the track and rounded the

elevators of the town, passing along Main Street where everybody greeted him, he scanned the stores and houses to the right till he came to a small building which bore a large sign, "A. R. Howden, Real Estate, Insurance, Farm Loans." He drew his horses in.

"I'll be back in a moment."

A young lady received him, prim, superficially pretty. Her whole appearance, with its lack of lasting qualities, "went against his grain."

"Miss Flaws?" he asked.

"That is my name," she said with an affected smile.

"Ah!" John Elliot said sharply, with a jerk of his head. "I want to speak to Mr. Howden."

Mr. Howden, big, suave, ponderous, appeared in the door of his private office.

"Just what," John Elliot asked, "is standing against Mr. Sately's farm on section eight?" That served as a pretext for having a look at Miss Flaws.

"Two thousand; that is, the principal debt." Mr. Howden was glad to see Mr. Elliot taking an interest.

John Elliot nodded. "I know the rest," he said briefly. "Charges unpaid for three years."

"Four," Mr. Howden corrected.

"Thank you. That's all I wanted. There will be a meeting on Tuesday."

"So I hear. So I hear." And Mr. Howden bowed his caller out.

Half an hour later the democrat topped the last hill: the view opened up on the farms in the hollow

beyond. An exclamation escaped the young woman.

"How do you do it?" she asked.

His look followed hers. "Summerfallow," he said. The green field ahead stood in striking contrast to John junior's parched and yellow acres. "Fallowed in June."

The young woman nodded. "That's what I keep telling Frank."

"I noticed his oats. When was that seeded?"

"Oh!" Gladys cried despondently. "Frank is slow, slow! On the last of June."

"When he should have finished his fallow."

"But, father!" she felt impelled to defend the man whom she had chosen before all others. "So many of them say the late-sown crops do best."

"Fools!" he replied angrily. "We get the early and the late rains. Build conclusions on one year's chance conditions! Get your seed in before the last snow flies if you can."

"But the fallow . . . Did your fallow get rain this year?"

"No." His voice was stubborn. "Unless we have a wet summer next year, I won't have a crop either. I can stand it. It will be the first failure in eleven years."

Gladys sighed.

"Mother has a garden even!" she said as the vehicle rolled down into the valley.

"We've carried water for weeks," he answered ruthlessly.

At the house, Gladys seemed bewildered by the pres-

ence of the two strangers though Pete was not altogether strange to her. Cathleen who had always liked her best of her older sisters noticed with surprise how awkward and bashful she was during the introductions.

Henrietta came noisily forward. "Mother's upstairs, Gladys. I'll take charge of the baby. Come, baby, you'll stay with auntie, won't you? Sure, you will."

Gladys escaped upstairs, into the room where her mother lay on her bed, dressed but dishevelled. To Gladys' wistful eyes she looked enormous and swollen.

The two women between whom there was only nineteen years' difference in age lay mutely in each other's arms. To the mother, her oldest child was a reminder of the past: when Gladys was born, Mrs. Elliot had been a young girl herself; though, of all the children, Gladys resembled her father most, she was, to the mother, an embodiment of her own care-free youth.

They remained together for no more than a quarter of an hour; few words were exchanged between them; yet worlds of meaning and comprehension were conveyed.

"No, mother," Gladys said, "you stay right here. To-morrow is Sunday; then you come down in the afternoon; not to-day. There is no need."

Mrs. Elliot heaved a sigh of contentment. "I am so glad to have you here!" And, drawing her close, "Gladys, I know it is a sin. I can't help it. The rest . . . They are all my children. But I must tell you. They are strangers."

"I know, mother. I know. And so, at heart, is father."

Mrs. Elliot looked frightened. "How can you tell?"

"Never mind, mother. He's a man. We'll be alone this afternoon. Don't worry. I'll go down and look after things. Just as if you were there yourself. Lie still."

For an hour or so Gladys was slipping through the house, like a ghost, intruding nowhere, yet omnipresent.

In the kitchen, Isabel was depositing two sealers filled with strawberry preserves. Gladys picked one of them up and held it against the light.

"Spoiled," she said as she put it down.

"Spoiled?" Henrietta exclaimed indignantly. "Spoiled nothing! I put them up myself!"

Gladys unscrewed the top. "Taste," she said, having smelt the contents. "There is water on it instead of syrup."

"Well," Henrietta shouted. "I'll be . . ."

"Sh!" Gladys nodded to the ceiling. "Mother!" Then, after a moment's pause. "Watch the boys, Norman and Arthur. They've poured the syrup off. John used to do that. Don't let them get into the cellar."

"What?" Henrietta said intensely. "Let me catch the scamps! I'll show them where they get off!"

Gladys had already turned into the dining room; dense clouds of smoke issued from the music room where Mr. Ormond and Pete sat in discussion. Her

father hated smoke. She slipped to the door and closed it.

"I'll tell you, Pete," Mr. Ormond's voice was saying. "Credit is the forerunner of tenancy every time. Crop-payment purchase leads to a state of things resembling feudal tenure."

"It's the devil!" Pete's bass replied. "But what are we to do?"

"That," Woodrow said, "is beyond my jurisdiction. I investigate facts and conditions. I enunciate laws; and there the domain of science ends."

"Then," Pete objected, "science is barren."

"Perhaps. I might say—not as an economist but as a private citizen—that what has built the east of this country is plain living and high thinking; we are trying to build the west by high living and plain thinking."

Gladys turned away. From a window she saw John going from his well to the shack. She slipped through the front door.

In the yard, Cathleen was picking flowers for the table.

Gladys stopped. "I like him," she said.

Cathleen looked up into her sister's worried face. "He's a scholar. They say he is a coming man. What do you think of mother?"

Gladys raised her hands in an expressive gesture. "Get this excitement done with as soon as you can!"

"It's Mary. That's what has upset her so!"

"Perhaps. I am going to John's."

"Hello!" John greeted her, stopping in front of his shack and smiling broadly.

"Aren't you disking?"

"Henry is, sure. You didn't think I worked myself?"

"Well, you try to make out you aren't."

"How's mother?"

Gladys replied by the same gesture with which she had answered Cathleen's question.

John's face darkened. "Say, sis," he asked gloomily. "You don't know. I'm going to get married. I was going to fetch my girl over to-morrow."

"Who's she?"

"Miss Flaws. From Howden's office in town."

"Oh!" Gladys said. "That is why father went in!"

"Did he?" John whistled through his teeth. "What do you advise? Better wait?"

Gladys considered the case. "No. I don't think so. Get it over with while I am here. It seems they all get married. How about Isabel?"

"Sure. As far as I know, Ken is going to see the old man to-day."

"Four weddings," Gladys said. "Well, get it over with. I'll go back to the house."

"All right, old girl."

As Gladys turned away, she shrugged her shoulders as at so much tomfoolery and trifling.

CHAPTER V

JOHN ELLIOT BUYS LAND

IN the private office of the president of Farmers Limited tension was in the air. The atmosphere was not what Fred Sately had hoped for.

Of the directorate, Fred Sately and Messrs. Maclean and Murray were present, the last-named being "out on bail." Mr. Heap, a lawyer from Regina, represented the bonding company; Mr. Howden, the holders of the mortgage on Sately's land; Mr. Macdonnell, the bank at Kicking Horse.

To a few of them it was known that rumours of the impending negotiations had got abroad. A number of shareholders in the company, as many as had been able to get together on short notice, had met, on the eve of the meeting, at the house of a farmer living near town. A stormy, irregular session had ensued. Nobody knew what its result had been. Those who had heard of it expected trouble.

Shortly after John Elliot's quiet entrance—he was clad in his black Sunday suit, with collar and tie—the seven men assembled looked at each other.

Fred Sately rose. "Gentlemen," he said wearily, "you are all aware of the purpose of this meeting. We are trying to arrive at a settlement, out of court, of the affairs of the business conducted, largely by myself, under the firm of Farmers Limited. As you

know, the concern was incorporated in 1902 under a Dominion charter, as a company with limited liability, for the purpose of trading in implements, motor-cars, farm produce, etc., to the benefit of the farmer himself. It has operated successfully for a number of years, but finds itself at present involved in financial difficulties which, to my mind, are of no serious nature, provided all concerned will exercise reasonable forbearance and agree to necessary compromises. I, as the president of the company, shall act as chairman of this meeting."

John Elliot, hardly seated, raised his head. "Excuse me if I interrupt you," he said. "This is no meeting of the shareholders of Farmers Limited. There are seven men present. Three are officers of the company. Apart from them, as far as I am aware, not one is interested in the company as such. Not a shareholder has been officially notified. As far as I can see, the purpose of this meeting is to find out with how much of a sacrifice on my part a semblance of your personal integrity can be maintained. I move that we proceed to elect a chairman."

He had spoken angrily. When he began, Fred Sately complacently stroked his black moustache; but as he proceeded, he sank back in his chair.

Three grave heads were nodded around the mahogany desk.

"Move Mr. Elliot act as chairman," some one grumbled.

John Elliot protested. "No! I want to be able to concentrate on the substance of this discussion, without being hampered by the formalities. Move Mr.

Howden be chairman. And Mr. Macdonnell secretary."

Again a nod went around the desk. The three officers of the moribund company glanced at each other.

Noiselessly a young lady entered, slipped behind Fred Sately's chair, and whispered to him. He rose with a frown; but it was too late.

From the door a diabolically uttered "Ya-ha!" resounded. "Just as I thought!" the rasping voice went on. "I guess I ought to get in on this."

An old man sidled into the room, beardless, toothless, with a few white wisps of hair straying irregularly over a bald, shining pate and a Mephistophelean smile playing over deeply-wrinkled folds of skin. The broad-shouldered, loose-jointed figure was clad in grimy jeans. As he ceased speaking, he stood open-mouthed, with a single, long, yellow tooth projecting between his lips as if he were pointing it forward.

All eyes focused on him.

The single, yellow tooth rose as if it were straightening its back. Then it tilted forward again, pointing an accusing finger to Fred Sately's chest. If the Satanic smile on his face was a pose, he held it for a long time.

Fred Sately nodded dismissal to the stenographer. Under a general silence the young lady slipped demurely out and closed the shining plate-glass door.

"I fail to understand, Mr. Suddaby," Fred Sately said. "This is a private conference."

"Private?" Mr. Suddaby shrieked in a falsetto voice which seemed to execute gyrations in pitch, from treble to alto and bass, and back again. With a pe-

culiar click he closed his jaws grimly and drew his breath in noisily through his nostrils. "Private?" he repeated. "If my guess counts for anything, the fate of Farmers Limited is going to be decided here. The shareholders held a meeting last night, out to my place, and elected me their representative."

"Pardon me," Fred Sately said with a venomous glint of his eye, "the shareholders of Farmers Limited cannot hold a meeting unless it is called by myself. If a few of them get together privately, whatever they may resolve is in no way binding on anybody. I appeal to Mr. Heap to confirm what I say."

Mr. Heap, a massive, weary man of sixty, nodded gravely; but his eye twinkled sideways at the farmer who stood dumbfounded.

"Binding or not," Mr. Suddaby shrieked at last. "We are in on this, or, by the Lord, the attorney-general of this still young and foolish province is going to be the one to call a meeting next."

Fred Sately shrank. He looked about him with an unsteady look. His eye met that of his father-in-law.

John Elliot raised a hand. "Mr. Suddaby," he said. "Take a seat. Mr. Sately is right. We were on the point of electing a chairman. All present are here on invitation. If you will allow us to proceed, we shall consider whether your presence is to be permitted or not. Personally I see no objection."

Mr. Suddaby subsided. "Mr. Elliot," he said ingratiatingly, bowing his head sideways and folding his arm against his breast, "I hope you are well this morning? And your respected spouse the same? I

accept your word of peace, as who would not around this countryside?"

A smile lurked in the corner of Mr. Heap's eye as he moved a chair which Mr. Suddaby occupied with exaggerated gestures of deference.

"I made a motion," John Elliot said soberly. "What is the sense of the meeting?"

A discreet raising of hands indicated that his choice was approved of.

Mr. Howden took his seat at the head of the table; and Mr. Macdonnell, the short, asthmatic banker, moved to his side, reaching for paper, pen and ink.

Mr. Howden waved his arm at Fred Sately who was still standing behind his chair. Listlessly he sat down.

"As for Mr. Suddaby's presence?" Mr. Howden asked blandly.

"No objection," Mr. Heap grumbled. "The more light we can throw on this matter . . ."

A nod ran around the board.

Fred Sately sank a little deeper into his chair. Light was not what he wanted.

His father-in-law fixed a cold stare on him.

"It seems to be the opinion of the assembly," Mr. Howden summarised, "that Mr. Suddaby is to be admitted. All in favour . . . Contrary . . . Carried."

"Thank you, gentlemen, thank you!" Mr. Suddaby cried fervently, with a comprehensive, circular bow. But when he arrived at Fred Sately, he stopped; his jaw fell; and the single tooth dropped forward.

"Let us get started, gentlemen," Mr. Howden admonished. "I suppose this meeting was called to con-

sider the financial status of Farmers Limited, was it?"

"Hardly quite that," John Elliot said. "I was instrumental in bringing it about, I believe. I don't know that I had a very clear idea of its purpose myself. Mr. Sately came to me for financial aid. I have a large family to consider. I want to see clear. To protect my daughter, his wife, I should be willing to do what I can without prejudicing others. From what I hear and fear, Farmers Limited is doomed. But if I can save a fair name . . ."

"Ha!" Mr. Suddaby sang out, raising an arm as if lifting a bugle. "The fair name of Mr. Fred Sately!"

John Elliot's icy stare silenced him. "The fair name of Mary Elliot," he corrected.

"I stand rebuked!" Mr. Suddaby trumpeted with a deep inclination of his head. "I stand rebuked!"

"I suppose," Mr. Heap interposed, turning to Fred Sately, "you came prepared with a statement of assets and liabilities?"

Fred tossed a paper across the desk.

The lawyer glanced over it and handed it on.

"Did you bring your ledger?" he asked.

He was handed a book; and again he turned its leaves without betraying any interest.

"A list of the shareholders?" he asked next; and, when it was handed to him, he began to figure on a small sheet of paper.

Then he made his last demand. "A statement of receipts and expenditures?"

This time, when he had completed a rapid perusal, he laughed sardonically. Still, he said nothing till the papers, passing through John Elliot's and Mr. Mac-

donnell's hands, had reached Mr. Howden. This proceeding took up the better part of an hour.

Then, with a shrug of his enormous, loose shoulders, "So much for Farmers Limited!"

Mr. Suddaby could not contain himself. "Ya-ha!" he shrieked, trying to subdue his voice which escaped control; and, in the furious endeavor not to let it rise too high, he screwed his face into fearful grimaces. "Farmers Limited doomed, Mr. Heap? There will be an assignment? How much on the dollar?"

"An assignment!" Mr. Heap repeated with withering contempt. "My dear man! There is nothing to assign!"

"I hold shares to the amount of a thousand dollars!" Mr. Suddaby exclaimed ecstatically as if he were speaking of the wealth of kings. "I paid six hundred dollars for them."

"You mean," Mr. Heap grumbled, "you gave a pile of junk. It figures on the books. There's a binder put down to your credit at a hundred dollars. Did the binder work?"

"Ah!" Mr. Suddaby admitted. "It needed a few repairs."

"No doubt Mr. Sately will be able to satisfy you by handing the binder back to its original owner."

With a gesture of disgust John Elliot pushed the papers back. "I don't understand a word of all this," he said wrathfully.

"Let me enlighten you, Mr. Elliot," said Mr. Heap urbanely. "The idea of Farmers Limited was to sell the farmer whatever he needed at market prices; and to buy from him whatever he had to sell, also at mar-

ket prices. The profit made, after overhead expenses were paid, was to be divided among the shareholders in the form of dividends. A sound idea. The principle underlying all cooperative enterprises. The authorized capital was a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Of that twenty-three thousand have to date been paid in cash; the remainder largely in junk.

"The directors, the three worthy gentlemen present, voted themselves their salaries in a duly called directors' meeting. The president, who was also the general manager, was to receive three thousand dollars a year; the other two, a thousand each. At the first shareholders' meeting a carefully prepared statement was presented which showed a considerable book-profit. That this profit consisted in an accumulation of unsaleable junk marked at fabulous prices was of course not divulged. A dividend of eight percent was declared and, just as the officers' salaries, paid out of capital funds. Of this dividend, the honourable president, who held about thirty thousand dollars' worth of stock, pocketed a neat little sum. Besides, he made trips to the east, to Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, seeking business connections, and his expenses were paid. When machinery, binder twine, and other orders arrived, small payments were made. But, when at last more substantial payments were peremptorily demanded, there was no money.

"That much the statements submitted to you betray to him who is familiar with reading such documents. It is the story of all fraudulent enterprises.

"I can add a few items of information. Recently, when the directors were pressed for money to keep

their ship afloat, and in order to stave off a creditors' plea in bankruptcy, the vice-president of this honourable company did not hesitate to dip into municipal funds. When he was threatened with exposure, the secretary and he entered into a conspiracy. The secretary covered the deficit by drawing on school funds. When the books of the school board were going to be audited, the vice-president in turn helped the secretary out by putting municipal moneys at his disposal; and thus they juggled accounts, see-sawing frauds, till one day the school board caught on to their manoeuvres. The bonding company which I represent had to make good a deficit of slightly over two thousand dollars. No doubt Mr. Macdonnell has other claims."

"I have," the short, asthmatic banker said, rising to his feet. "But I am not involved in the company as such. No banker could have been deceived by statements like these. To me Mr. Sately came as a private citizen, a farmer owning a half section of good agricultural land, held in freehold, unencumbered."

"Unencumbered!" Mr. Howden, the chairman, exclaimed. "I happen to represent the mortgage company which holds a lien for two thousand dollars on that land."

"Yoo-hoo!" Mr. Suddaby yodled. "A pretty kettle of fish! A pretty kettle, I must say!"

While this exposure of his misdeeds was being made, Fred Sately sat in his chair, humped over, white as a sheet, looking down at his folded hands.

Messrs. Murray and Maclean were throwing appealing looks at the man who bore the lion's share of the guilt.

John Elliot rose, trembling, hardly able to control himself. "I wash my hands of it!" he said irately. "I will have nothing whatever to do with it!"

Fred Sately rose. "Father! . . ."

For the first time John Elliot raised his voice. "Sir! Don't father me, if you please! The sooner that relation is sundered, the better!"

"Yoo-hoo!" Mr. Suddaby howled in ecstasy.

"Think of your daughter, sir!" Fred Sately fawned.

"It is of her I am thinking! I am going to take her home with me!"

"Never!" Fred Sately, losing the last vestige of his self-control, was wringing his hands. "Think of the children, sir! Let me make a last appeal! I wish that Mary, my wife, were here to confirm what I say. She will never leave me. She has told me so. She has told her mother. She is an Elliot, sir."

John Elliot broke into a contemptuous laugh. "You think you are a clever pleader!" For a moment he stood brooding. She was an Elliot, yes. No Elliot would forsake a fallen angel. The man was right, of course!

Mr. Howden rose. "Gentlemen, let me suggest a way out. There is one asset left, the land. Land has always its value even though it may lose its price. I suggest that Mr. Elliot buy the farm. Perhaps only to resell it in time. The funds thus made available would repay the bonding company and the bank. If Messrs. Heap and Macdonnell would waive prosecution and observe silence about the proceedings of this morning? . . . As for Farmers Limited, Mr. Heap has concisely stated the case. It rests between the

shareholders and the directors. We must leave Mr. Sately to their tender mercies."

This was a ray of light. John Elliot had only one desire; to spare his daughter what to him seemed the worst, the disgrace of a prosecution. To his old-fashioned mind all things were bearable—poverty, privation, destitution, all except one, the loss of an unsullied name. He nodded. "I will say this. I don't know what the land is worth. But, if every man present will pledge himself to secrecy, I will cover the defalcation and the bank debt as far as it was incurred under false pretences, assuming the mortgage which I may and may not pay off. In return, Mr. Sately will issue title to the land to me. But on condition that, for my daughter's sake, he be saved from going where he deserves to be sent, to the common jail."

Fred Sately straightened.

But Mr. Suddaby was bent on being heard. He, too, had risen to his feet and was waving an arm. "Where do we come in?" he shrieked.

John Elliot mercilessly shrugged his shoulders. "In that, sir, I am not interested. You must be considered the gullible victims of this gentleman's machinations."

"Yoo-hoo!"

"Just a moment," Mr. Heap said, dominating the chaos by the deep rumble of his bass. "Suppose Mr. Sately issue invitations for a general meeting of the shareholders, stating as the purpose the election of a new board of directors whose task it will be to wind up the affairs of the company if such be the pleasure of the assembly. There are some assets; a rate on

the dollar could be paid. Not much, I am afraid; but something is better than nothing. Would that satisfy you, Mr. Suddaby?"

Mr. Suddaby stood open-mouthed. His single tooth bowed and rose. He dropped into his chair. "It will have to, I reckon," he said more quietly than he had spoken so far. In truth, he was greatly elated at the fact that he had been able to wring any concession whatever from this meeting.

"Gentlemen!" Mr. Howden said, towering benignly. "Let us be seated, please."

And, the chairman setting the example, all obeyed. Half an hour later, the meeting broke up.

Fred Sately, white and chastened, sought his father-in-law.

John Elliot froze him with a look. "Keep your thanks for yourself, sir. What I have done, I did against my conscience, for the sake of my daughter."

He shook hands with the banker, the lawyer, the real-estate man, and left.

Before he fetched his horse from the stable, he went to the big house near the end of Main Street.

When he knocked, Mary, clad in light, filmy things, fragrant and fresh, came to the door, waving the servant back to the kitchen.

She led him into the darkened parlor.

"Father," she whispered, "you came to his help?"

"For your sake, my child."

"I knew it!" she exclaimed and dropped her head on his shoulder as she had done once before when she became a bride, ten years ago.

"Mary," he said with an unsteady voice, "I want to ask you to come and return to your parents' house."

Mary raised her fine arms so that her sleeves fell back to her shoulders. "Father," she cried, "I can't. How could I? For ten years Fred and I have lived side by side. I did not know what he did; nor he what I did. We shared bed and board, that was all. For the first time when he came to me and told me this, did I count in his life."

"Has he told you all? Has he told you that he faced indictment and prison?"

"All!" she cried. "Look, I have adorned myself to receive him!"

"It means poverty, Mary. All that finery you will have to give up. You will have to leave this house."

"Gladly!" Mary sobbed. "Don't you see, father? My life has been empty. It will be filled. I shall live in a hovel and hoe a garden if I must. Provided I am not merely a flower to be sniffed at." She shrugged her shoulders and nervously dabbed a diminutive lace-edged handkerchief to her eyes.

John Elliot stood helpless. He foresaw nothing but disaster. This was emotional extravagance. He hesitated. Should he leave her? Should he apply the surgeon's knife? The latter course was prescribed by duty.

"Mary," he said, "you don't realise. If you choose him, you cut yourself loose from your family. Between him and mine there can be nothing in common." And, with all the emphasis of which he was capable, "Mary, he is a common swindler!"

"What of it!" Mary cried angrily. "You don't

understand. You can't understand. You are of a different generation. For ten years I have brooded and read, feeling useless. I have dreamt of just this. I have wished he were a defrauder or safe-breaker, so I could go with him and advise and plan. Anything rather than what I was, the one to whom he came merely to satisfy his desires in a legitimate way. So long as he takes me along, I shall not mind going out on the highway and begging the bread for him and myself and the children. He has played for great stakes and has lost. He has asked my advice. It was I who suggested the way out which he chose. He has promised to take me into all his counsels. I am living at last instead of merely existing."

Her father stood aghast. A shudder ran down his spine. Of a different generation, was he? This woman was not in her senses. A last appeal!

"Mary, you must realise that I cannot come to his help again. I am a poor man and have ten children. They all are entitled to their share. I shall lose on this deal."

"Father," she said wearily, "you speak of the help you gave him. But what have you done? You take his land, do you not? You get value for your money!"

"Good-by, my child," John Elliot said. "May things come out as you expect."

He kissed her forehead and turned away.

An hour later he drove into his yard.

Cathleen and Gladys were among the shrubs in front of the house. He stopped and beckoned to them.

"I wish," he said, "you would go to town one of

these days and drop in on your sister Mary. She might open her heart to you. Let me know how you find her."

"Certainly, father," Cathleen said.

Gladys nodded in the slow, deliberate way which had become hers.

Mrs. Elliot was in the music room, reading the Bible. Woodrow and Pete had gone to the field with John junior. Isabel was in the kitchen with Henrietta.

As her husband entered, Mrs. Elliot looked up. "How did the meeting come out?"

"All right," he said lightly. "In order to rectify matters, I bought the land."

CHAPTER VI

DEATH

ON August fourth the quadruple wedding was solemnized in the dining room of John Elliot's house. All four couples were married by special license, the ceremony being performed by a minister of the Anglican church, in deference to Mr. Ormond and Pete who both belonged to that denomination. That they did not go the twenty-four miles to the nearby little city of Kicking Horse, was due to the state of Mrs. Elliot's health.

With two of her children Mrs. Elliot had tried to remonstrate about their choice.

To Isabel she had said, "You can't see this thing the way I do, my child. I have no doubt but that Kenneth is an honest man. I hope he will be a good provider. But I feel it my duty to touch on another thing, painful as it is to me to do so when you have chosen. There is such a thing as descent to be considered. For the smooth running of the everyday life nothing perhaps counts for more than a conformity of manners and little tricks of speech. Kenneth has had a different bringing up from you and the rest of my children. Perhaps he is somewhat lacking in refinement. He uses coarse words. He eats with his knife. These things he will necessarily transmit to his children, unless you can change them. Are you sure, Isabel,

that you will either have enough influence with him to uproot his early training or that you will be able to bear with it?"

"Of course, mother!" Isabel had said half rebelliously.

"One more point, and I shall have done. You are all brothers and sisters; but you are taking widely different courses. So far you can all meet in this house which forms neutral ground. But will Woodrow, for instance, be willing to sit down at Kenneth's table; or to receive him in his home in the city?"

"If he doesn't," Isabel said, "he can just please himself."

Mrs. Elliot, feeling that her influence had been waning, gave up all further attempts and kissed Isabel on her brow. "May you find all you look for in life!"

To John she had been even less reserved. "I will not conceal from you, John, that I view your choice with alarm. I do not think at all that Lillian will make a farmer's wife. I cannot imagine her milking a cow or raising fowl."

"Mother," John had replied, "I don't want her to. Times are changing; and we change with them. Farming is no longer the simple, self-contained business it has been with you and father. Machinery takes the place of horses and man-power."

"Machinery," Mrs. Elliot observed pointedly, "will never produce milk and eggs."

"No," John agreed laughingly. "But we can buy canned cow and egg-powder. I look upon farming as more or less a financial game."

"I know. It has long been a source of worry to me.

As for this marriage, I want to be quite outspoken. I disapprove of it. But you are of age and can do as you please, my son. You have noticed, on the few occasions when you brought Lillian to this house, that your sisters did not take to her. I believe they would show it even more distinctly if they were not preoccupied with their own affairs."

"Mother," John pleaded, "I have asked the girl. You do not want me to cast her off?"

"No." Mrs. Elliot spoke reluctantly. "Though I consider a broken engagement less of an evil than a divorce."

"Mother," John said very solemnly, "I give you my word. Come what may, there will be no divorce."

"Very well," she concluded. "I take that as a pledge that you will always be forbearing and make the best of things."

That had been her last effort. During the wedding ceremony she had stood and sat about, ornamental but statuesque, as if things did not concern her.

Gladys was still in the house, though she had gone home twice to clean her own shack and to cook and bake for her husband. The second time she had brought Norah along.

Margaret also had come home for the wedding. She was a slender, tall girl, remarkably pretty. She did not say much but looked on, critical and reserved. She and Woodrow Ormond had had a long talk about ways and means of working one's way through a university course. She was not going to ask her father to finance it. He suggested that, with girls, the chief

obstacle to their completing an extramural course lay in their tendency to get married.

"Small danger of that," she had said disdainfully.

"I hope not! The men will be only too willing."

"But I won't. I'll be my own master while I know my mind."

On the evening of the wedding day two democrats, one of them borrowed, started away from the house between the hills. In one, driven by John Elliot senior, sat Henrietta with Pete, and Cathleen with Woodrow Ormond; in the other, driven by old Mr. Harvey, the blacksmith, a white-bearded, hollow-chested man with enormously muscular arms, Isabel and Kenneth, John and Lillian, and old Mrs. Harvey, the driver's wife. The last two couples were going to spend a few days at Regina; all four were going to board the same night-train east. Lillian's parents had neither themselves appeared in the west nor insisted that their daughter should be married from their own roof in Eastern Ontario. Both vehicles were, besides, encumbered with baggage.

Mrs. Elliot, leaning, in the crowd of guests, mostly elderly people, on Gladys' arm, appeared for a moment in the door and feebly waved her hand as, with much shouting and laughing, with throwing of rice and broken plates, the two democrats got under way. Then, without shedding a tear, she turned back into the house and at once climbed upstairs to her room.

So far she "had kept up a front"; now she gave in to her exhaustion and indifference. Gladys helped her to get into bed.

Downstairs, the guests took leave one by one, addressing their compliments to Margaret and Frank Bramley, the only grown-up representatives of the family that were left. Henry, Norman, and Arthur had retired to John's shack.

The only ones—for Mary had not accepted the invitation which had been sent her. When Gladys and Cathleen had returned from the call they had made on her, a week or so ago, Gladys had refused to say anything at all. "No use," she had said. "No use talking about it." Cathleen, with a shrug of her shoulders, had given brief information. "Fred came in while we were there. He flew off the handle and showed us the door." Their father had cautioned them not to tell their mother.

At last, when the strangers were gone, Frank went to the stable, took his horses out, and hitched them to his wagon—he had no buggy.

Margaret slipped upstairs to say good-by to her mother.

Mrs. Elliot lay on her back, apathetic and helpless. She scarcely responded to the kiss of her youngest daughter. When Margaret left the room, Gladys followed her without a word.

Dusk had fallen over the valley, filling the hollow like a translucent fluid. The two sisters, oldest and youngest of the Elliot girls, went across the yard. Both felt forsaken, deprived, by the incomprehensible indifference of their mother, of a support which had never yet been lacking.

"Do you think mother is seriously ill?" Margaret asked.

"Mother is going to die," Gladys said quietly.

Margaret shuddered at the tone of her voice. She felt in the presence of an old, old woman proclaiming doom.

They went to the stable, for Frank was going to take Margaret along; he would pass her boarding place, ten miles north of town.

"What are you going to do?" Gladys asked her husband.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully.

"Can you bach it during harvest?"

"Are you not coming out at all?"

"I cannot leave mother."

He replied by a vague gesture. "There is no crop. If you keep the children . . ."

"I'll see to the children."

"All right. You ready, Margaret?"

"Yes." And she climbed into the box of the wagon.

For a moment Frank stood, holding the lines of his horses as if waiting for something. Then he, too, climbed over the wheel.

Gladys, who had changed into a gingham house dress, stood in the chill dusk, bent over, thin, her arms folded on her breast, her hands clasping her fore-arms below the elbows, looking straight ahead as if deep in thought.

"Well," Frank said, "good-by."

"Good-by," Gladys said without moving.

It was a chill leave-taking, chill as the air that breathed over the hills.

Nobody knew how the frail, thin woman that stood on the turf was tempted—tempted to flee from the

terrible task which awaited her at the house—a task of which nobody knew but herself.

Late at night John Elliot returned and entered the quiet house which but yesterday had been so full of life. Gladys met him at the foot of the stairway.

"I have made up the south room for you, father," she said tonelessly.

He looked up.

"I am afraid," she went on, "mother's very, very sick."

"Do you think I had better go for a doctor?"

"I do. Though I did not intend to ask you till morning. She does not want him, of course."

Her voice, like her person, was thin. It had a cold, sharp ring. It sounded as a thin, hard knife without a handle looks; it was all cutting blade.

"Very well," he said. "It is twenty-four miles. I cannot be back before morning. Can I see her?"

"Better not," Gladys replied, still with that hard, unwavering look of hers and with an expression as if she were shivering.

He took his hat and crossed over to the shack. It, too, looked empty and deserted. Reaching the door of the shed-like structure, he turned the knob and entered. There were two rooms, both large, bare, unfinished.

He groped his way through the kitchen to the bedroom.

There he struck a match and lighted a lamp.

Henry occupied one bed; Norman and Arthur the other.

Was this a house to bring a wife into?

He shook Norman till he awoke.

"You must get up," he said. "Mother is sick. I am going for the doctor. Hitch John's bronchos to the buggy. I am going to change my clothes."

Norman jumped to his feet. He staggered. "Yes," he said. Then, "Would you mind repeating that?"

John Elliot did.

Norman broke into a frenzy of hurry.

"In the morning," John Elliot added before he left the room, "if I am not back, you will have to attend to the feeding alone."

"All right, father."

Half an hour later John Elliot was driving north, by the light of a waning moon, just risen, till he hit the west road, a mile south of town, which was one day to be part of the great Trans-Canada Highway.

It was hours past midnight before he reached the little city. It was three o'clock in the morning when, with the drowsy doctor by his side, he started on his way home. No sleepiness assailed him: he was in the inexorable presence of incomprehensible, enormous things, too terrifying to permit indulgence in human weakness. Yet, he reflected, he had seen what was threatening only in the mirror of his daughter's face. "Can I see her?"—"Better not!"

An unearthly cry greeted the two men as they

alighted, with the rising of the sun, in front of the grey house in the hollow between the hills.

From the window above, drawn and pale, Gladys looked down on them. Norman came running to attend to the horses.

They entered.

"A basin and water," Dr. Goodwin said, depositing his satchel in the hall where a remnant of the night still lingered.

Five minutes later he entered the bed-room upstairs. John Elliot stopped at the door. Gladys turned to the window.

The doctor, a stockily built man of fifty-five, with a grey moustache on his serious face, sat down by the bed-side.

On that bed a fat woman was lying, unrecognisable. She was gasping for breath and pressing her abdomen with narrow hands as if she were trying to push it away. She was turning and twisting in agony. Little sounds, like grunts, escaped her contorted mouth in staccato sequence.

The doctor sat and stroked his chin.

John Elliot took a step forward as if in an impulse to come to her aid. But the sick woman, with a terrible face, looked at him and waved him aside.

He turned and sat down at the top of the stairway.

Five or ten minutes went by. Once or twice he heard the quiet voice of the doctor. Then the grunting groans of the woman ceased. Soon after, a hand touched him on the shoulder.

It was the doctor, standing behind him and motioning him to go downstairs.

In the dining room the table was still laid, horse-shoe fashion, littered with the remains of the banquet.

The doctor raised his bushy, grey eyebrows.

"I don't know," he said, closing the door. "I want a consultation. Has she been like that before?"

"Never."

"How about the expense?"

"No object."

"Very well. I shall send a nurse and wire for a specialist. Dr. March of Winnipeg. I shall meet him at Sedgeby. Possibly day after to-morrow. We shall see. We will need the nurse anyway. An operation . . ."

"What do you suspect?"

"I don't know. A mere conjecture . . ."

"And that conjecture?"

"Cancer."

John Elliot threw up his hands.

"I have given morphine. Can you take me to town?"

"Any time. Breakfast?"

"We'll get it there. Take me to the nearest telegraph office."

At eight o'clock Mrs. Nielsen, the nurse, summoned by telephone, was on her way from Kicking Horse; a telegram had sped to the western metropolis.

Dr. Goodwin returned with John Elliot to the house in the hills to await the arrival of the nurse. When, shortly before noon, she came, he departed in the vehicle which had brought her.

In the afternoon Arthur, who had gone to school

alone, brought a message from Dr. March saying that he would arrive on Tuesday evening's train.

Meanwhile Mrs. Nielsen, an unattractive, middle-aged woman who stuttered, kept Mrs. Elliot in a sort of twilight-sleep; the household readjusted itself to the changed conditions.*

Once or twice, during this interval of waiting, John Elliot looked in on his wife. As he stood by the bed on which she reposed, huge in girth, a shapeless mass of relaxed muscle, he muttered to himself, with an expression on his grey, leathery face as of incomprehension, protest, and resentment against he knew not what.

Whenever he entered, Gladys went to the window, staring out across the road; she understood only one word which he uttered repeatedly and which came from his lips with the peculiar quality of a bursting bubble. "Odd!" he said. "Odd!"

At other times he walked about in the house, restless, disturbed; or he went to the field to look at his crop.

In the dining room all signs of the banquet had been cleared away. At no time did the remainder of the family assemble for a meal. The boys ate in the kitchen; Norah, nobody knew when or where. John Elliot found the table in the dining room laid for himself alone. This, more than anything else, drove it home to him that he had become like a passenger on board ship: the helm was in other hands.

Anarchy seemed to be ahead. He felt pushed and ordered about. Even when, on the second day, train time drew near, Gladys told him that he must hitch

up to go to the station. The worst of it was that, though he scowled, he felt that he needed the reminder. He would have forgotten. He felt so dazed.

Dr. March, a short, stout man with a club-foot, clean-shaven of face, made himself at home in the house. He went about in his shirt-sleeves and overall apron and gave orders in a voice which permitted no hesitation. Dr. Goodwin treated him with a deference which sent everybody into a trepidation of compliance.

It was nine o'clock at night before he took Gladys aside and whispered to her. "Now, my dear young lady, I wonder whether you could have a little supper prepared for Dr. Goodwin, myself, and your father? Have it served in a room where we can talk undisturbed."

"Supper is ready," Gladys said without a smile.

At half past nine Dr. March, having supped with great appetite, praising Mrs. Bramley's cooking, pushed his plate back and, putting a toothpick in his mouth, drew his shorter leg up on the knee of the other.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "this is a serious matter, Mr. Elliot. We shall have to operate at the earliest possible date. Carcinoma uteri. It means excision. Dr. Goodwin will attend to the transfer of the patient to the hospital at Kicking Horse. I myself shall take the night train east. There are preliminary matters to observe, dieting, etc. I shall return, going through to Kicking Horse, on Sunday evening. On Monday morning—the knife." He

looked sideways at the man whom he was addressing, drawing his right eyebrow up in a questioning way.

John Elliot cleared his throat. "Is there . . . Is there hope?"

Dr. March laughed a falsetto laugh. "We can't tell. The disease is far advanced. We can do only what science prescribes in a case like that. I can promise you care and skill. I cannot promise a favourable response on the part of the patient. It will depend on how determined she is to pull through. Sometimes it depends on the care with which disturbing elements are excluded. Dr. Goodwin will have charge of the case as soon as I finish. I have full confidence in his experience and conscientiousness."

"Hm."

"My dear man," Dr. March went on, "you don't understand. I am asking for your consent."

John Elliot nodded.

"You consent, then?"

"Consent?" John Elliot was too dazed to understand.

"Yes? Don't you see? The patient herself not being, for the moment, in a condition to give or refuse her consent, we need that of the next of kin."

Again John Elliot nodded.

"Say it, then."

"Say what?"

"That you consent, my dear man."

"Yes," John Elliot said, much confused. "I consent."

"At last!" Dr. March said with a sigh of relief and

rose. "Will you please have the buggy or some other conveyance ready for me in half an hour? I must get to Sedgeby in time to make arrangements for the night express to pick me up. I understand it does not stop for ordinary passengers."

In the kitchen, Gladys left the door where, bent over, her hands clasping her arms, she had listened.

On the very day when the huge motor ambulance which carried the patient had departed, followed by a second car which conveyed John Elliot, the nurse, and Gladys with her two children, John junior and his young wife came home with Isabel and Kenneth Harvey. The house was deserted.

"Well," John exclaimed, "beats me!"

He looked about in the evening twilight and let his eyes roam over the fields. In the west, a six-horse team was drawing a disk across his furrows.

"That's Henry," he said. "Well, we'll have to make the best of it."

They unloaded the baggage; and John paid the driver of the hired democrat.

Mrs. Elliot junior stood about, pretty, useless. Isabel, with her usual energy, applied herself to the task of preparing a meal. Kenneth threw himself down on the grass in front of the house.

"Eh, John," he said, "back in the doggone old country!"

John sat on the step, worried and puzzled.

A few minutes later Norman and Arthur came running down the hill.

John sprang up. "What's wrong?"

"Mother's sick. We had two doctors here. They are taking her to the hospital. It's cancer, Gladys says."

"No!" John exclaimed, intensely sobered.

Kenneth rolled over on the grass. "Cancer!" he said. "There's doggone few that recover from cancer!"

John felt an odd revulsion at the coarseness of speech of his brother-in-law. Without a word he started off to his shack across the road.

His young wife followed him. "Jack!" she called.

He stopped in the middle of the road, frowning. He wanted to be alone. His last act, that of marrying the girl who was calling him, had been a revolt against his mother. He had hurt her. If she was going to die, he could never make up for it. It was too late! Too late! These two words were the two most grimly terrible ones in the whole human vocabulary!

Yet he took himself in hand. "Lillian," he said, "I can't just now. I want to be alone for a moment."

She looked out of narrowed eyes. Her mouth straightened. She was dressed in a new suit, with a pretty hat on her head. About her neck hung a laval-lière with a diamond set in onyx. In one hand she held a pair of grey silk gloves; with the fingers of that hand she turned the wedding ring on the fourth finger of the other. Her face was powdered; her lips were rouged.

John, who had spent the last few days in an orgy of sensuous pleasure and vanity, felt that all this was incongruous. He himself wore tan-coloured oxfords

and silk socks; his blue suit was of ultra-fashionable cut. His collar choked him.

He was on the point of speaking. Then, with enormous force, his mother's words rang in his ears, "I take that for a pledge that you will always be forbearing and make the best of things."

He waited and took her arm as he went on.

Arrived in the shack, they looked about.

"When do you think our furniture will arrive?" Lillian asked, her glance provoking.

He shrugged his shoulders. "That's neither here nor there now." He proceeded to get into working clothes. After a while he added, "We'll have to stay at the house till it does come. This shack needs a new floor; and I'll add another room before we move in."

Shortly after, Isabel and Kenneth left, going to the new cottage which Kenneth's father had built for his old age. John and Lillian were left in possession.

"Do we have to go to school?" Norman asked.

"You certainly do," John decreed as master of the place. "Let me tell you, boy, I wish by now I had attended to my studies when I had the chance. By the way, you know this shebang better than I do. Where's the bread?"

"In the crock in the cellar," Arthur said. "There's a roast ready cooked."

Late in the evening John drove to town and bought many tins of canned goods. But when, with their help, Lillian tried to prepare her first meal, it was found that there was no can-opener in the house. A butcher knife was used in its place.

Two days later, John, Lillian, and the three boys were sitting at supper, consuming the remainder of the big roast, with canned peas, tomatoes, and sauerkraut—an odd mixture which John and Norman seasoned with molasses—at which Lillian laughed, a sharp, pointed laugh—when Gladys stepped into the door.

She allowed her glance to sweep from one to the other, arresting it on Lillian's dress of white, "polka-dot" voile—she had no house dress. Gladys suffered from the feeling that things were going topsy-turvy in this house.

"Hello," John hailed her. "How's mother?"

She nodded mutely and shrugged her shoulders. "Can you take me home?" she asked. "I left the children in town. I walked out. I'll tell you on the way."

"Sure," John said and rose.

While he fetched his horses, Gladys stood by the door. Her younger brothers held her in great awe and did not approach. Lillian felt offended at her manner.

On the way north she said very little to John. "Mother has been sick for years. She has never let on. She held out till the weddings were over. Then she gave in. I'm afraid it's too late."

John Elliot senior did not return till the Tuesday of the following week. Having received word of his son's return, he had sent him a telegram, asking to be met at the station.

He said little. "The operation was successful, that is all they would say. God knows what they mean."

At the house, John Elliot frowned at the state of things. He did not approve of his daughter-in-law's presence there.

"When are you going to move back to your place?" he asked as he paced the dining room at night.

"Soon's the furniture arrives. At once if it's wanted."

"No. Take your time."

John junior was hauling lumber. A carpenter appeared on his place, adding a room west of the shack.

On Saturday, John Elliot returned to Kicking Horse, taking the train and leaving word with John to fetch him on Monday.

The same arrangement was repeated the following week. But on Sunday, to his anxious surprise, a messenger from town summoned John. A long-distance telephone call was waiting his presence.

It was his father speaking from Kicking Horse.

"John," he said over the wire, "your mother is coming home to-morrow. You must vacate the house. And you must go for Gladys. Norah, her girl, must stay with you. Move a bed or two over if you have not accommodation enough. Is that room finished which you were building?"

"All but the shingling."

"Try to finish. If you can't, you will have to let it go. No hammering on the place!"

"How is mother?"

"It's only three weeks since the operation."

"Can she be moved?"

"She's taken a dislike to the hospital. She wants Gladys. The doctors think it will do her less harm

to be moved than to keep her here against her will. I shall bring a nurse, of course."

On John's place the carpenter worked all night. John went to fetch Gladys.

In the early morning, on Monday, John and Lillian moved over, providing accommodation as heretofore for the boys. Isabel volunteered to take Norah with her. The space in front of John's shack was encumbered with numerous crates which contained new furniture.

Shortly after dinner, like a funeral procession, the motor ambulance moved slowly down the hill road to the house, followed by a buggy in which John Elliot sat by the side of the driver.

Since the ambulance in which the patient lay on a stretcher, accompanied by a young doctor and the nurse, contained ample room, it was strange that John Elliot should come in a separate vehicle.

At John's remark, Gladys shrugged her shoulders. "She has changed toward father," she said.

The ambulance stopped. Gladys stood in the door of the house, in that attitude which had become characteristic of her: bent forward, as if she were peering into darkness, with her hands clasping her arms below the elbows. A set frown furrowed her thin, transparent forehead. She was thirty and looked forty. Small and slender, she made the impression as if she shivered.

Under the signalled directions of the doctor, John and Kenneth who had come over lifted the stretcher out, Norman and Arthur lending a hand, each on one side.

The patient lay apathetic and motionless, shrunk to an appalling extent.

Doctor and nurse entered the house; John Elliot motioned up the stairway.

The doctor shook his head. Gladys threw the door to the dining room open. The doctor nodded.

"Quick," he said, setting the example by removing the cover from the large dining table.

In less than a minute, Isabel and even Lillian helping, the furniture of the room was removed into kitchen and music room. In the bay window to the south all blinds were drawn.

Thus the stretcher was deposited.

John and Kenneth flew upstairs where Gladys was already gathering the bed-clothes of the best bed, the one last occupied by John Elliot senior.

Five minutes later, Mrs. Elliot was left alone with Gladys and the nurse.

John Elliot senior's presence in the house resembled henceforth that of a barely tolerated stranger. He tiptoed from hall to kitchen; from kitchen to hall. He went upstairs and looked into the rooms. They seemed bare and empty.

What was this that had come between him and his wife?

When he was consulted about some arrangement, he felt that it was for form's sake only. He nodded before he even understood. He was useless. Anything, anything . . .

A strange life began on the place. Nobody was ad-

mitted into the former dining room except by special permission from Gladys. Among those admitted most frequently were John junior and Isabel. Once Mary came and sat with her mother for an hour. Margaret also came. Cathleen and Henrietta who offered to come were told to wait.

John Elliot senior was almost invariably informed that it would be better not to disturb her. He suffered greatly under this exclusion. Once he was asked to read her the Sermon on the Mount. But he had read no more than ten or twelve lines before a movement of the patient's hand told him to stop; he was waved away.

Dr. Goodwin called every two or three days. The patient was doing well, he said.

Meanwhile John Elliot was cutting his grain. A new routine, strangely empty, strangely futile, established itself.

Two or three weeks later it was broken by the great and joyous event of Mrs. Elliot's being permitted to sit up in an arm-chair.

It was a beautiful day of the end of September; and, after a short deliberation, Dr. Goodwin even nodded to the suggestion to let the patient enjoy the open air for ten minutes or so. Before she was taken back into the house, every member of the family that was within call had been notified, including Henry, Isabel, and Kenneth.

Henceforth, to all outside eyes, a recovery set in, almost marvellous in its swiftness. Mrs. Elliot was able to rise and relearned to walk. The nurse was dismissed. But never a word was said about letting

Gladys go. Gladys shared her mother's room. Once a week Frank came and stayed for a day.

John Elliot senior often looked at his daughter as if he would have liked to ask her questions. Between him and his wife stood a barrier. Not once were they left alone. Never did she address him in speech. When he spoke to her, she hesitated before she answered; sometimes she acted as if she had not heard. Gladys, on such occasions, neither stirred nor spoke. By some inexplicable expression she conveyed to him the idea that, mentally, she was shrugging her shoulders.

The time came when Mrs. Elliot could be taken out for short rides. John Elliot senior offered to take her. She asked pointedly for Gladys. As soon as Gladys was out of sight—as when she had to attend to her baby—Mrs. Elliot was restless, suspicious.

Meanwhile, in the shack across the road, Lillian blundered her way into some sort of housekeeping for John, herself, and the three boys.

Then a terrible thing happened. Nobody except Gladys ever knew how terrible it had been.

Harvest was completed; fall-plowing was in full swing. In town, a thanksgiving dance was announced.

Mrs. Elliot who had strangely recovered a semblance of her former good looks, but without her stoutness, repeatedly asked about that dance: so much Gladys later divulged in explanation.

Late in the afternoon of the day she asked Gladys to have a horse hitched to the buggy; she was going to town.

Gladys tried to dissuade her; but, knowing that things were much less well with her mother than any one else suspected, she thought it necessary to humour her. There was nobody near the place; she went to the barn and harnessed the horse herself.

At the house, her mother was dressing in her best black silk. The dress had not been changed since her illness and was much too wide for her. She stuffed little pillows and other soft things into the bosom to fill the folds of its waist. About her legs it hung loose and uneven.

Thus, when the buggy drove up at the door, she lifted herself to the driver's seat and reached for the lines. She looked grotesque. Gladys, in deadly fear, stayed with her, clad in a house dress, without even a wrap to protect her against the fall air.

Unobserved by any one they drove away.

When John Elliot came home, the house was deserted, the buggy gone from the shed.

He went across the road to his son's. Neither Gladys nor his wife were there.

John junior hitched his bronchos up and drove to Harvey's. The two women were not to be found. When he returned, it was dark.

"Mary's?" he suggested to his father.

"I don't think so. But we must try, I suppose."

They went together. Mary had not seen them.

"Gladys might have wanted to see Frank?"

"You go," the father said. "I'll walk home."

When he reached the house, it was nine o'clock. The house was dark and dead.

For three hours John Elliot walked up and down in front of that house. Isabel came to enquire. He had no news. She went home again. Lillian and the boys came, looking a question. He answered by a wave of his hand.

He thought of a search party. But he must wait for John. John came soon after midnight.

"No," he said as he drew his steaming horses to a stop. "I galloped them nearly all the way. I'm afraid I foundered the off horse."

"Can you think of anything?" his father asked as he went with him to help him unhitch by the light of the moon.

"No."

"A search party?"

"Perhaps."

When the horses had been turned out into the horse-lot, the two men talked for a while, standing by the democrat into which they had thrown the harness.

In John's shack a light was burning. "Come to the house," he said.

There, in the newly fitted kitchen, all painted white, Lillian was sitting up, stiff and morose.

Norman peered in from the old room in which the boys had slept for the last six years. "Mother home?"

Nobody answered him.

Suddenly John who was nearest the door stood still.

"Sh!" He listened.

Distinctly the rattle of wheels could be heard from the north road.

John lifted the lantern which stood by the door,

ready-lighted; the two men ran down into the hollow.

As they reached the road, with the gate of the older farm straight opposite, the buggy came rolling down into clear view. It held the two women.

Mrs. Elliot was driving. She was smiling, triumphant. On Gladys' features lay sinister despair.

Without a word John Elliot opened the gate.

When Mrs. Elliot alighted, with tired, broken movements, she said defiantly, "For once in my life I have had a good time!"

She left horse and buggy to the men, dropping the lines; as she made for the door, holding on to Gladys, she almost sank onto her knees with every step.

For an hour or longer father and son waited in front of the house. The light in the former dining room went out; a minute later Gladys joined them.

She touched them on their arms and went down to the gate. There she stopped and whispered.

"She went to the dance. She had the whole crowd terrified. One after the other had to dance with her."

"How could you let her?"

"You don't understand. She is out of her mind. You don't know!"

"Why didn't you send for us?"

"I couldn't. She watched me all the time. I couldn't speak to a person; she would have bolted."

"My God! My God!" John Elliot senior groaned.

"It seemed she was getting along so nicely!" John junior said.

"That's it, you don't know! You don't know. I must get back. She might wake and miss me." She turned, with the furtive movements which had become

hers of late. Then she stopped. "When will the doctor be out?"

"Tomorrow from what he said."

Gladys nodded.

Behind the two men, inside the other fence, a white figure stood in the moonlight, with an apron wrapped about her arms.

"Well," John junior said, "nothing else to be done for the moment. Snatch a bit of sleep, I guess."

"Sleep if you can," his father replied and walked off.

Henceforth, as Mrs. Elliot slowly sank to her death—for, as it proved, this escapade of hers had torn all the newly knitted, delicate sutures in her body—a secret and disquieting life went on in the house, a life shared by none but Gladys and carefully guarded from every one, even Mrs. Nielsen, the nurse, who came back a day or so later.

Never, to her dying day, did Gladys speak about it to any male member of the family, not even her husband or her father; and only once, eighteen years later, shortly before her father's death, when she herself was a matron of forty-eight, did she reveal glimpses of it to her two sisters Cathleen and Isabel who were sitting with her in Isabel's house.

This was in substance what she said.

"It was terrible, terrible! I have not yet got over it and never shall.

"One day when father had been in the room and she had motioned him away, she turned to me. Gladys, she said, I am a bad woman!

"Mother, I said, how can you say such a thing!

"Oh, she cried, I don't even know any longer whether there's a God or not. If there is, I don't care. Come here, listen. I want to whisper to you. You may think I've had so many children because I was fond of them. No! They just came. Because I lived an evil life with your father. Look at me!—And she suddenly bared her body: a terrible sight!

"Another time she said, Gladys, I am the harlot of Babylon! And she wailed and cried, half, I believe, from pain; half from despair.

"She always talked of the despair she was in. There is nothing left to me but despair! Despair!

"One morning I brought her her breakfast, a cup of broth. She was half sitting up in her pillows. When she saw me, she bent forward till her forehead touched her knees and whimpered, waving her hands sideways as a little bird flutters its wings.

"Sit up, mother, I said.

"She raised her head and looked at me, out of tear-flooded, despondent eyes. Gladys, she whispered, I have always heard it said that it is dangerous for an insane person to have broth for breakfast!

"Many a time when I sat with her and she was lying down, she would raise herself and stare at me, making the most dreadful faces as if she hated and despised me.

"At last, when I felt I was going to be ill myself—by that time mother refused the least service from the nurse—I spoke to the doctor about it. He nodded. Yes, he said, I have often known them to be like that in cases of cancer.

"He began to give morphine regularly, in increas-

ing doses; it seemed the pains grew steadily worse.

"And yet she lived on for months and months.

"At last I wrote to you all to come if you wanted to see her once more alive. I remember it as if it had been yesterday when all her children were once more assembled. She had had just enough morphine to dull the pain. And it seemed that her only thought was to reconcile us all before her death if there had been any ill feeling between us."

Of all these things that went on in the house and which wrought a great change in Gladys—she became much less intolerant to her husband—John Elliot senior knew nothing. Yet he was for ever preoccupied with the thought of his wife and his relation to her. Many a time, while plowing, that fall, he would stop his horses in the field and sit and stare. Then, "Odd!" he would say, with that peculiar quality of voice as of a bubble bursting on his lips. And he would shake his grey head and go on with his work.

During the winter his hair and beard became white though he was only fifty-six years old.

In spring, while he was seeding, he saw his whole family assembled twice; once when their mother expressed a wish to see them; and again at the funeral in June.

No longer did he try to direct his children; he merely looked at them and saw them with new eyes. He saw things which he had never seen before; and he saw them with a new attitude, the attitude of a spectator. They were beyond correction; but he felt a strange curiosity what it would all lead to.

He puzzled over his relation to them.

Photography was becoming a fashionable pastime. One day he had seen Cathleen develop prints. She immersed an apparently blank sheet of paper in a solution contained in a tray. A few irregular patches appeared on its surface. These patches gradually arranged themselves into a picture, each one assuming a definite, purposeful significance.

Thus his children appeared to him. The developing solution was life itself. They had been mere blanks, more alike in the lack of distinguishing features than differentiated by the small deviations in texture. Like those first patches on photographic prints certain peculiarities had asserted themselves in each of them, mysterious in their significance. Perhaps, if a person had been able, with his imagination, properly to interpret them, he might have changed the picture that was to appear by and by. But insight was lacking. Development went on; and suddenly character and fate became readable as the features connected themselves to each other.

Correct them? How can you correct what you do not know? Blame them? The picture on the blank sheet appeared because the hidden chemistry of the underlying strata had been influenced in some incomprehensible way. Only that appeared which was already invisibly traced in its layers. There was something uncanny about it. We can but become what we are. . . .

At this stage of his own life and development John Elliot came to call this mysterious quality in the characters of men and women God.

BOOK TWO

CHAOS

CHAPTER VII

JOHN ELLIOT SELLS LAND

DURING the decade or so after the death of his wife, life seemed chaos to John Elliot. What happened, seemed devoid of meaning; he neither understood, nor did he care to understand.

The thought of his wife greatly troubled him. That she should have kept him away during the last months of her life had wounded him deeply; but he tried not to think of it, for fear that such thoughts might keep him from doing his daily duty. In fact, for a long while, he deliberately put away all thought of her; and on the rare occasions when he did not succeed in doing so, he visualised her as she had been before her illness had overtaken her.

When, at the end of June, Norman and Arthur wrote on their "entrance" examinations Norman, sixteen years old, failed; and Arthur, barely fourteen, passed "with honours."

For a while Norman went to work on John junior's place. His father seeded only eighty acres a year and became more and more jealous to do every bit of the work himself.

One day, however, John and Norman quarrelled; they were too much alike to be entirely compatible.

Norman refused to comply with an order given by John.

"You do as I tell you!" John shouted at him so that his voice could be heard throughout the valley.

Norman sat down on the ground and laughed. "Why should I?"

"Because I tell you to!"

"You? Who are you?"

"I'll show you!" But suddenly John controlled himself. "Listen here, Norman! Because I am your older brother."

"That does not give you the right to act the boss, Johnnie dear! I'll tell you. Pay me a man's wages, and I'll do a man's work."

"Wages!" John exclaimed. "If I want to pay wages, I'll hire a stranger."

"Very well," Norman answered. "Do so. I quit."

And up he rose and went to town, walking.

John, ruefully, sought his father in the field and told him all.

John Elliot senior listened without a word. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "We'll see."

In the evening he drove to town and had no difficulty in finding Norman. The boy had taken a "job" in the local garage, newly opened. His father, for the time being, acquiesced in the arrangement.

Next, Margaret who, on her mother's death, had come home and kept house for her father and the two boys—Henry, weak-minded and strong-backed, continued to live with John—declared her intention to take a school again in the fall.

"You see, father," she said, "I want to go on with

my studies. Woodrow has arranged for me to take an extramural course at the university. Here at home I somehow do not find time for reading. When I teach, I have definite hours of work. I make my own living and have plenty of leisure left. Have you ever thought of the possibility of engaging a housekeeper for yourself?"

"A housekeeper?" he muttered and tried for a moment to visualise a strange woman in the house. "Well," he added after a while, "you must do as you please."

Hardly had Margaret taken this step when Arthur spoke up. "Father," he said one evening, "do you think there would be a way for me to attend high school?"

His father looked at him from where he sat in the large easy chair of wicker-work, in the bay window. He had always spoken highly of education; he could not very well contradict himself. But the fact remained that they all wanted to leave him.

Arthur noticed his hesitancy; he had set his heart on going; he feared a refusal. "Cathleen would take me," he said. He was a slender boy, clean-looking, with a long, narrow face and strangely irregular teeth, his whole appearance a compound of Cathleen and Isabel.

"Well," John Elliot mused, "it might be arranged, perhaps."

It was arranged. John Elliot's wish and will counted for little. He was no more than a clearing-house of the family; through him they worked their will.

Next, like a thunderbolt, towards the end of summer, came Henrietta's return.

"What is wrong?" her father asked.

She did not answer. She hummed a tune, threw her head into her neck, and walked imperiously up and down through the room.

"How about Pete?"

"Oh, don't talk about Pete, father! I have left him."

He looked at her without comprehending. She stayed at home and took Margaret's place. With her as housekeeper, life was not comfortable. What did it matter?

The summer was dry. There was no crop, not even on John Elliot's summerfallow. That fallow would yield feed, no more. John junior plowed his wheat under; it stood only finger-high.

One day when he met his father in the road—the two households were now completely separated—he said casually, "Well, I'll stick it out for one more year. If there's no crop next fall, I'll pull out."

"Where to?"

"Manitoba, I guess. They say you're sure of rain there."

John Elliot senior had great faith in the country; he shook his head. "A rolling stone gathers no moss."

John junior repeated that saying to Kenneth Harvey.

"By gosh and by gum!" Kenneth exclaimed. "You don't gather moss either by lying still under a parching sky." By that time it was well known in the fam-

ily that old Mr. Harvey, the blacksmith, paid his son's store-bill in town. What little farming Kenneth attempted to do was done on his father's homestead, not on his own. His father's place adjoined his own half-section.

John junior assumed a mortgage on his place and borrowed money besides at the bank which, that very year, had opened a branch at Sedgeby. He had been elected to the municipal council and was "road-boss," thus making a little money "on the side."

Then, while fall-plowing was under way, a second thunderbolt fell in the valley between the hills.

One day, John—who left all the actual field work to Henry—went out to look at his plowing. Henry was drawing his furrows from east to west whereas John had told him to do so from north to south.

John's temper was suffering from many causes. For one, Lillian, his wife, was not liked by any member of his family; and this resulted in domestic friction.

He flew into a towering rage. "Ah!" he yelled. "Get out of there, you good-for-nothing, brainless idiot!"

Henry—who was good-looking, in a peculiar, thoughtful and yet vacant way—stared at him from where he sat on the plow, holding the lines of his six horses.

"Get out of there!" John repeated, now beside himself.

Henry, without any warning, an inane smile on his face, swung the whip at his brother. He aimed at his head, too high. John dodged the lash just in time.

Henry aimed a second blow, now rising on his foot rests, the smile fading from his lips. This time he struck at John's legs. John saved himself by a leap into the air.

For several minutes blow came after blow. John, without a word and thoroughly frightened, dodged and jumped in order to escape the lash and meanwhile edged closer in to rush his brother.

Henry, inferring his intention, while with one hand swinging the whip over his head—now in a circular motion—with the other hand reached down to press the lever controlling the plow-shares, thus lifting them clear of the ground, and gathered the lines in his left. As soon as he held them, still aiming the outer halves of his circular blows at John, he directed the inner halves at the rumps of the horses which reared and then dashed away.

The moment he left John behind, he gave his undivided attention to the horses, lashing them mercilessly till they tore along, six abreast, in a stretched gallop.

When, at the western edge of the preemption, he came to the line-fence, he tried to turn; but the horses were beyond control.

At that moment one of the wheels of the plow struck a huge stone in the margin of the field; and, the horses crashing through the barbed wires, the plow broke. Henry was thrown; and the wire, stretched by the horses' onrush beyond its strength, burst and coiled back like the body of a wounded snake, hitting Henry's head. Its barbs tore a gash across his scalp.

John came running after him in huge bounds, mortally frightened. When he reached his line, he saw that the horses had kicked themselves free of the eveners and torn their lines: they were scattering over a fan-shaped piece of wild prairie. Beyond the line lay the plow, a tangled mass of steel ruins.

For several seconds he looked about as if blinded before he saw his brother who lay, an inanimate, bleeding body, on a stone pile to the right, half hidden in the rank, ripe thickets of tumbling mustard.

John's terror deepened. He knelt down and applied his ear to his brother's breast. The heart was beating; life was not lost.

John rose; his knees shook. Although there was nobody to hear him, he stammered, "By golly! . . . By golly!"

Then, by sheer animal effort, he collected his wits and straightened.

He dragged his brother away from the stones and turned him on his face. He must take him where there was water. So, grasping him by his arm-pits, he swung him up, twisting his own body under him, and threw him on his back. Thus he started at a half run to cover the mile to the shack.

Meanwhile thoughts flashed through his head. "A year ago! Only a year ago things went smoothly! Why? Because mother was living. She held the whole family together. By the mere fact that she was there, she kept all evil passions under control. She's gone! And I give in to my temper! Henrietta leaves her husband! Everything goes to the devil!"

He could never understand how he managed to

cover the distance with his load; but in twenty minutes he reached the shack.

He threw the body on the bed in the old bed-room.

Lillian stood in the kitchen, ghastly white at the sight of his blood-soaked shirt and blood-smeared face and head. John had lost his cap in the chase for his brother.

When he had thrown off his load, he turned and almost shrieked at his wife, "Close the door! This is no sight for you!" For Lillian was with child.

Yet, a moment later, he came into the kitchen to get a basin and a pail of water. His huge nether lip was hanging down; his round shoulders with the bullet-head above them gave him the appearance of a gnome.

Before he returned to the bed-room, he said curtly, "Run over. Tell Hennie to come."

By the time his sister entered, Henry was awake. He lay exhausted. John was washing the blood from his head.

"Well, I declare!" was all Henrietta said. Tall, stern, domineering, she looked down at the three. She, more than any one else, detested Lillian and made no secret of it.

"Nice doings, I must say!" she added after a while as if her sister-in-law were to blame.

Lillian was in a state of trembling excitement. "Jack!" she wailed. "You should have taken him over to your father's place!"

"Oh-o!" Henrietta said. "He is good enough for John while he does his work. But when he is sick, you remember that he has a father, do you?"

John who was washing his own head straightened and looked at her.

Under that look which seemed to speak of the woman who had gone to her grave, she could not but wince. Yet, when she turned to go, without having offered any help, she did so with a haughty shrug of her shoulders.

Lillian went into hysterics under the insult of her attitude. She flew at John. "Yes," she cried, "you stand by and allow your sisters to fling mud at me!"

"At you?" he said calmly. "I thought she meant me."

John Elliot senior—he was at the time cutting his crop with the mower, to rake it up for feed—had seen Lillian run to the house in a panic. He had left his horses and crossed over to John's shack. Just as he reached the small gate, Henrietta came out and passed him without saying a word.

He entered the kitchen at the very moment when Lillian burst out at her husband. Vistas into unknown depths seemed to open before him.

He looked from one to the other. "What has happened?"

In a few words, John gave an account of the accident, taking all the blame himself. "I should not have flown off!"

John Elliott senior went to the bed and examined the cut on Henry's scalp. "Just a flesh-wound," he said. "If he is not hurt internally, he will be all right in a day or two."

Henry lay quiet; his well-formed features were marble-white, it is true; and his erratic eyes were

strangely expressionless; but there was not a trace of hostility in his face.

To all appearances John Elliot senior took the matter rather lightly. But, as he returned to the field, he felt that one more horror had entered his life.

Isabel was the first of the newly-married sisters to be confined. Dr. Goodwin was sent for, by orders of John Elliott. Mrs. Harvey, Kenneth's mother, stayed with her for a week. The child was still-born.

Then news came from Cathleen. On the fifteenth of August she had given birth to a girl. The name chosen was Martha, in honour of her who would have been her grandmother had she lived. Woodrow wrote word that it had not been easy; but mother and child were as well as could be expected under the circumstances.

John Elliot felt that he lived in a changing world. The family which he had founded, that of the Elliots of Sedgeby, had broken up strangely. Its members were scattered beyond his ken. Cathleen? Who was Cathleen? His child? Yes, twelve years ago she had been his child; but now she had become a stranger. And yet, her little girl was his grandchild. How could it be?

He looked at Henrietta. Surely, with her, too, things were on the way. Why was she not where she belonged, with her husband?

A dozen times he cleared his throat to speak. A dozen times it seemed he could not do so. She would "snub" him! Henrietta, this amazon, his child?

One night, almost against his will, the question

slipped out. "Isn't there something on the way?"

She veered around and caught the direction of his look. He surprised an expression of anger on her face though it was almost dark in the room.

"Eh?" she said with a note of disgust and went out into the kitchen.

When, ten minutes later, she returned, carrying a lamp in her hand, she sat down at the table and began to speak in a brisk, business-like way. "I've been thinking, father. Pete's writing to me. I believe I'll go back."

He nodded his white head. "I wish you would."

She glanced at him. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, I!" he shrugged his shoulders.

As a matter of fact, since the illness of his wife he had come to consider himself as of very little importance.

Henrietta left during the first week of December. John Elliot senior took his meals at John junior's shack—till Lillian was confined, giving birth to a girl who received the strange name Diana.

Then he "bached it." It would be only for a week or two, for Margaret who was teaching a "summer-school" would no doubt be home for the long winter holidays. All things were in a flux. It did not pay to make definite and permanent arrangements just yet.

But when school closed, Margaret did not come home. She did not even consult her father about it. Between the sisters a correspondence was carried on—a correspondence of which he knew nothing. Between them, they had arranged that Margaret was to

visit at Cathleen's place and to attend lectures in the university; perhaps she would thence proceed to Henrietta's.

John Elliot wrote three angry letters, one to Margaret, one to Cathleen, one to Henrietta. He received no answer.

About Christmas Henrietta was brought to bed with twins, both boys, their names to be Grant and Allan.

Life seemed to flow by, leaving him behind, as it were.

He made up his mind to readjust his own existence after all. He made the "music room" into a bed-room and moved the kitchen stove into the dining room, abandoning the upper story altogether. John junior and Isabel offered to help him in effecting these changes; he declined their help. They said he was getting to be very "queer."

One day, in the dead of winter, during the last week of January, Fred Sately dropped in shortly after dinner time: Fred Sately—with whom he had severed all relations more than a year ago!

For reasons into which John Elliot did not enquire the affairs of Farmers Limited had not yet been wound up. The shareholders' meeting had taken place as agreed upon. But somehow the old directors had succeeded in extracting from it, during a stormy session, a vote of confidence. Since then, there had been no rumours of dissatisfaction.

When he entered his father-in-law's house, Fred Sately wore his old air of quiet self-assurance. With

his serious face, his wide-set eyes, and his hanging, coal-black moustache, now dyed, he still made the impression of a careful and successful business man.

The look which John Elliot—busy with the few dishes which he had used in preparing his dinner—fastened on him betrayed nothing but surprise.

Fred, reading the signs, thought it prudent to omit all preliminaries.

Without sitting down, he noticed, with a glance, the condition this great dining room was in, leaned back against the door-jamb, and asked, "Would you consider reselling the farm which you bought from me a year and a half ago?"

John Elliot mused. The place had been listed with half a dozen real-estate offices in the province; for, since he could not work it himself, it was an encumbrance on his hands. The expense of Mrs. Elliot's illness had been enormous. The crop had brought no money. He foresaw that, for the first time in his life, he would have to use savings in order to buy his seed. Yet he could not readily overcome his suspicion of Fred Sately's methods. His reply was guarded.

"I should consider a cash sale only."

Since Fred knew well enough that John Elliot had offered the land, through reputable agents, on any terms whatever, he took this answer as a warning. He smiled. "I propose a cash deal."

"Who is the buyer?"

"Excuse me," Fred said with the ghost of a smile. "I am acting as an agent. You would not expect me to lay all my cards on the table and to look on while the deal is completed through other hands?"

That seemed only reasonable. "What is the price offered?"

"It is not as simple as all that," Fred evaded. "I'll tell you. A British Columbia fruit farmer wants to sell his place and is willing to take a Saskatchewan farm in part payment. I have a cash buyer for that fruit farm, though not at the figure asked. If I put the deal through, I shall get a commission on the British Columbia sale. If I induce the seller to take your farm in part settlement, at a reasonable figure, I shall be able to turn the price of your farm over to you in cash."

"What do you call a reasonable figure?"

"Four thousand dollars."

The place had stood John Elliot in five thousand three hundred.

"I'll tell you," Fred went on. "You are getting up in years. We all hope you may have another twenty, thirty years to live; but you can't live forever. . . ."

John Elliot frowned. He was not afraid of death; but he resented hearing the event of his own demise treated as more or less imminent. "I don't see," he said frigidly, "what that has to do with the sale of the farm."

"Nothing," Fred said blandly. "But you are a man of substance. I do not know whether you have made a will or not. I suppose that whatever you may die possessed of will be equally divided among your children then living. Neither Mary nor I have any desire to rob others of any part of their share. Suppose we sign a receipt for thirteen hundred dollars, stating that we agree to consider that sum as part of the

possible inheritance, waiving further participation to that extent? Thus, in a way, we should reimburse you for your loss."

John Elliot mused. He had always considered what he had as held in trust. This proposal would solve the difficulty as far as his heirs were concerned. Apparently Fred was quite prosperous again; he and Mary still lived in that sumptuous house. Yet he hesitated. But at last he said, "If Mary agrees . . ."

"Very well," Fred said. "I have the papers here. You and your son know Mary's signature. It will have to be witnessed. I don't care who does it. Here is a power of attorney and an agreement of sale."

John Elliot removed the apron he had been wearing while washing his dishes. Then he reached for the papers and read them over. He sat down and read them a second and third time. Then he rose, said to the other, "Sit down," slipped his sheep-skin on, reached for his fur cap, and left the house.

He went across the road to John junior's shack.

Since the accident in the fall Henry had taken to sitting about in a surly mood, doing nothing. He was thus sitting in the kitchen, behind the stove, when his father entered. The old man flashed the boy a dark look and called, "John!"

"Yea," came John junior's answer from the room beyond—the new room which he had built somewhat over a year ago. He came, a book in his hand, hitching up his trousers.

"John," his father said, "I want you to witness Mary's signature on this paper. You can read it or not, just as you like."

John fetched pen and ink, sat down at the kitchen table, spread himself, and turned his enormous eyes back to his father, with a rolling, sideways motion of his head. "What's it about?"

"You can read it if you want to," his father repeated testily.

"Well-l-l," John drawled with that sleepiness which overcomes many farmers in winter. "I guess I better not. It concerns that Fred fellow."

And, with scrawling motions of his pen he affixed his signature in the proper place.

Lillian entered on tiptoe. "What is it?" she asked with her pointed voice.

"I don't know," John said; "and I don't care to know."

"I," Lillian cautioned, "should not sign what I have not read."

John Elliot senior stood and frowned. He received the paper and turned away. The remark of his daughter-in-law struck him in a peculiar way. Was he really getting old? Were they all waiting for him to die? To pounce on what he might leave behind?

Back at his house, he signed the power of attorney and the agreement of sale.

Fred gave him the paper signed by Mary and himself, nodded, said, "So long,"—instead of good-by—and left.

John Elliot went to the window to look after him: Fred walked.

Several times, during the next two, three weeks, John Elliot felt a curious misgiving with regard to

the deal. But, towards the end of February, one day, when he had driven to town to enquire for his mail, he found two letters at the post office, one from the local bank, with a notice that the sum of four thousand dollars had been placed to his credit by Mr. Fred Sately; the other from Mr. Howden who had looked after his interests in matters of the farm in question, saying that Mr. Sately had presented a power of attorney duly signed by Mr. John Elliot and had effected a transfer of the title to the farm situated there-and-there to Mr. Neil Carroll of Edgewood, B. C. All, then, was in order.

Middle of March John junior heard in town that a new settler had moved into the district, a Mr. Carroll from British Columbia. On his way home he passed the place and, following an impulse, drove in.

Mr. Carroll, a middle-aged man of genial face, clean-shaven, came to meet him in the yard.

"Thought I'd drop in," John said. "Going to be neighbours. Name's Elliot."

"You the man," the new-comer asked, "from whom I bought?"

"No," John replied. "My father. I didn't know he'd sold. Old man's not overcommunicative."

"I didn't know myself from whom I was buying till I got here. My dealings were with a man by name of Sately. He sold my B. C. property. I sure was glad to sell. Hate berry-picking. Say, this a good place?"

"Pretty fair," John said thoughtfully. "Excuse me. I'm interested in this man Sately. Treat you decent?"

"Not too bad," Mr. Carroll replied. "I paid him ten percent for effecting the sale in B. C."

"And on this place?"

"Nothing. The seller pays the commission, I guess."

"I may seem inquisitive," John drawled. "Don't answer if it don't suit you. Just what did you pay for this place?"

"Not at all," Carroll said, laughing at the other's droll look. "No secret about it. Six thousand dollars."

"And you got, for the place in B. C.?"

"Ten."

"Well," John said. "If you get rain here, you'll be all right. See you again."

"Won't you come in?"

"Not today. Another time. I'm the councillor for this ward. So long."

And he clicked his tongue to his bronchos.

When he reached home, he unhitched; and, lingering about the yard for a while, he waited till he saw his father cross to the stable to feed.

In a leisurely way he strolled over and lent a hand.

"Pretty sharp," he said when they had finished the task.

His father looked at the sky. "Yes. . . ."

"By the way," John went on. "I've been wanting to ask you. It's none of my business, of course. You sold that place of Sately's, did you?"

"Yes. Yes, I sold it."

"So I hear," John said. "So I hear. It's none of

my business, of course. But might I ask you what you got for it?"

John Elliot senior hesitated. "Hm. I got four thousand."

John junior nodded. "I thought that would be about it."

"It was a cash deal," his father explained; his tone was almost apologetic, so much was he struck by his son's peculiar way.

"Sure," John agreed. "It was cash all around. Especially cash in that Fred fellow's pocket."

His father threw him a glance, half questioning and half of anger at his meddling with things which admittedly were none of his business.

"I know," John nodded as they were slowly going down the hill towards the house, John sauntering with exaggerated slowness, his father bobbing up and down with those short, staccato steps which he assumed when he was angry. "I know what you mean. None of my damn business—excuse me! It ain't, I'll admit. I happen to know that Freddie made a thousand dollars commission on the B. C. sale."

His father shrugged his shoulders impatiently. The more his son betrayed that he was inwardly boiling with anger, the more his outward composure irritated the old man. "His right," he said. "His plain right. Let everybody do the best he can for himself!"

"Sure," John agreed. "Sure. Especially from a stranger. You don't care to divulge, I guess, how much commission you paid him?"

"I?" For the first time the old man's anger showed

itself in his tone. "Not a cent if you must know."

John junior whistled, bent his head to one side, and scratched his ear.

They had arrived at the door of the house.

His father looked at him, half anticipating the blow that was coming.

"Pretty slick game he must have played!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh," John said with a wide gesture of his hand. "My interest in the matter is, of course, purely theoretical. Just as son to father: how did he work it? did he buy the farm back from you?"

"No. No. Not exactly. I gave him a power of attorney."

"Slick!" John said. "Slick! Might almost admire it. Well," he added, half turning away. "Can't be helped any longer, I guess. Can't ask a crooked stick to be straight."

John Elliot senior was on the point of losing his temper. He often was, these days, when talking to his son. "I wish," he said, "you would speak intelligibly or keep quiet."

"In-telli-gibly?" John repeated. "You do, do you? Well, I'll speak so intelligibly that you'll get what I mean. That Fred fellow did you out of two thousand dollars. Carroll, the man who bought the place, paid six thousand cash. Our beloved brother-in-law will blossom forth with cutter and horses again, after having sneaked over the hills on foot."

He turned abruptly and strode into the wintry dusk.

His prophecy was fulfilled. Fred Sately bought a team of hackneys.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN ELLIOT GOES A-TRAVELLING

SPRING came. The crops were seeded.

The summer brought abundant rains: the grain grew as never before; it was a "bumper" crop.

John junior threshed twenty-five bushels to the acre that fall; the area seeded on his farm amounted to three hundred acres in wheat, besides oats and barley. His father threshed forty-three bushels to the acre; but his field comprised no more than the usual eighth.

On the other hand, John Elliot senior's crop was almost entirely profit. His son's was more than half mortgaged for debts assumed during the year; and, in order to put it in, he had had to hire help, for Henry had become quite unreliable on the farm.

Shortly after threshing Lillian went to Regina and spent a few hundred dollars; when she returned, John had bought a car.

News came from Fisher Landing: Pete Harrington had been ill with pneumonia but had recovered.

John Elliot senior was restless. As soon as plowing was finished, it froze up. He took to going to town. Strange to say, he struck up a friendship with old Mr. Harvey, Kenneth's father.

Old Mr. Harvey was a man huge in stature, bearded, hollow-chested, of enormous strength of body and especially of arm. He had not a single tooth

left in his mouth, being now over seventy years old. Yet he had, till very recently, been quite active, attending to his work at the blacksmith-shop without any help, except occasionally from his son.

But during the fall a strange disorder had come over him, depriving him of all the effectiveness of his strength. From a sort of inertia he still went down to his shop; but he had taken a partner into the business who did all the work.

His wife, old Mrs. Harvey, eight years his junior, was a thin, shrivelled old lady, white-haired, with a long nose and a narrow face. She had been an old maid of forty when she had married; and, as often happens in such marriages, she loved Jim, her husband, almost as much as she adored Kenneth, her son, who had come to her like a miracle late in life.

Old Mr. Harvey and John Elliot would sit together on a bench in the shop; and the old man would pour forth his complaints and detail his sufferings.

"Say, Elliot," he would say, "last year I swung that hammer there. Now I couldn't hold up a cane. Every muscle in my whole body seems to twitch all the time. I can't do anything any longer. Out in the open, my eye-sight is such that everything seems to jump and to tremble. Say, Elliot, I'm afraid I am going to die!"

John Elliot listened with an incomprehensible fascination and nodded. "Three score and ten!"

"But, Elliot!" the other would whisper, leaning over against his shoulder and touching his cheek with his bushy whiskers, "I don't want to die. I'm afraid. What is death? Can you tell me?"

"Well," John Elliot mused. "We cease to be, I suppose."

"Nonsense!" old Mr. Harvey bristled. "How can we cease to be, tell me that! How can I cease to be I?"

"I don't know. Perhaps there's a future life. Perhaps not." For John Elliot had relapsed into doubt.

"There must be. Don't you think so? Say yes, Elliot!"

"Yes . . ."

"Ah!" the old man exclaimed, pushing him away with his elbow. "You just say that! You don't believe it yourself!"

"I don't know. I don't know. I have my doubts. I've always had doubts. It wouldn't do to tell the youngsters."

"Why not?" the other asked. "Tell me that. Why not?"

"It helps to keep them in order," John Elliot said. "Reward and punishment."

The old man cackled an inane laugh. "Yea," he said, "that's it. Tales to frighten little children into obedience! But, Elliot, cease to be! I'm afraid, I tell you! I don't want to cease to be. How can I cease to be, tell me that!"

Thus went the vicious circle of the old man's talk. For ever he came back to that one question; and somehow it seemed to John Elliot that with it he touched upon the deepest problems of philosophy.

One day, in the black and grimy shop, John Elliot felt impelled to meddle in theology. He cleared his

throat. "I'll tell you," he said. "If you want to believe, there's a way."

"Eh?" the other man urged. "Tell me. Quick. Tell me."

"Get a few young people together in your own house and let them sing hymns."

"Go on! How should that help?"

"I don't know. It worked with me."

This quasi-friendship was of practical importance for John Elliot through a trifling circumstance.

One day the two old men went together to Harvey's house; Mrs. Harvey prepared a cup of tea.

"Mr. Elliot," she said, "I've often said to Jim, when we get old, we'll travel; we'll see the mountains and the sea. I wish he were well enough."

This idea struck home. He, John Elliot, did not care about the mountains and the sea. They were mere names to him, not pictured dreams. But he had children! He had grandchildren whom he had never seen!

The crop had been good. Out of its proceeds, as far as he had sold it, he had religiously replaced the thirteen hundred dollars loss suffered on the farm deal, plus the interest for two years; and yet there was a neat sum over.

He would go and visit the Ormonds in the big city, the Harringtons on their farm near Fisher Landing.

All the children had grown away from him. Since his wife's death the whole family had scattered; he had hardly seen Gladys since!

He did not make it clear to himself; but the breaking up of the family which, in a sense, was no more

than subsequent to that death, appeared to him as conditioned by it. Had his wife been the sole centre of attraction in his world? He would try to reunite them all.

Till Christmas he merely played with the idea. Then, in a letter to Cathleen, he dropped a hint. Cathleen promptly invited him to come.

He spoke to John, asking whether he and Henry could look after the stock in his absence. John at once agreed. "Sure, we can. Sure."

He left during the first week in January, taking a ticket to Winnipeg, Manitoba, and sending a telegram, as well.

It was a sixteen hours' journey by train, beginning late in the afternoon. All through the trip, not knowing about sleepers, he sat, slightly bent forward, leaning his chin on the crook of his cane, without touching the back rest of the seat.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when, through a driving blizzard, he saw the first scattered houses in the outskirts of the city. He rose and took his valise, moving along the aisle of the day-coach to the door.

There he waited. After an endless time the train slowly ground to a stop; and he climbed down the steps, a little stiffly perhaps, after the fatigue of the night.

On the platform, amidst the crowd of alighting travellers, he stood for a moment looking about forlornly. He put down his grip and felt in his pocket for the little note-book in which he had written out

the address of the Ormonds. The notebook was there.

The passengers hurried to a steel-hood roofing a stairway. He followed the stream.

A few minutes later he emerged in a white-tiled underground passage and stopped once more, looking about.

A tall, distinguished-looking lady, clad in furs, swept down upon him.

"There you are, father!" she said gaily and bent to kiss him.

A lump rose in his throat; he would not have recognised her!

She took his suitcase and, beckoning to a red-capped attendant, handed it to him.

Then she reached for his arm and led him out into the street. At the opposite curb a number of cars were parked. She pointed to one of them and signalled the red-capped attendant who ran across and deposited the suitcase in the rear seat, holding the front door open.

"Come," she said as she inserted herself behind the wheel.

John Elliot stumbled in.

She reached over and dropped a coin into the waiting attendant's hand. The door of the sedan slammed shut.

He hardly dared to look about in the quivering vehicle. The engine was running; and with a warning blow of the horn they shot forward into the traffic. He felt as if he were being kidnapped into things unknown and unheard-of.

Cars were still new at the time. But the lady by his side shot hers through the congestion of Main Street, dodging this way and that, speeding it up and almost stopping it, as if the task of driving were a mere trifle of the daily routine.

At the corner of Main Street and Grand Pre Avenue they stopped for a moment, awaiting the signal of the traffic policeman. Then they turned the corner and shot ahead again. After a fifteen minutes' run they turned once more, into a quiet, dignified side street this time, with sumptuous houses standing far back from the driveway.

Then, with a slight swing into a curved approach to one of the houses, running between snow-covered lawns, they slowed down and stopped.

A slender, well-dressed young man in a huge, grey ulster came running down wide cement steps and opened the door on the old man's side.

"Hello, father!" he cried. "I was just waiting to greet you. I am off to school. Where's your baggage?"

He lifted the suitcase over his father's head and sprang up the steps again, opening a wide glass door to the whirling snow.

This young man was Arthur!

John Elliot alighted and stood, bewildered.

"Just go in, father," Cathleen said. "I must run the car into the garage, or it will freeze up."

Rounding the corner, the car shot away.

"Come in," Arthur said and held the door.

John Elliot climbed the steps.

"Now," Arthur said as soon as he had entered,

"make yourself at home. Put your coat there. Cathleen will be back in a moment. You'll want breakfast. I must be off."

And away he ran.

The hall in which John Elliot stood was high and gloomy. So was the dining room to the right, the door of which was open. A thick-napped carpet covered the floor; dark oaken furniture stood in striking contrast to the snow-white table cloth whose corners nearly touched the floor. Pictures in heavy gilt frames were hanging on the walls above the dark wainscoting.

John Elliot felt sobered, repelled. He turned and had a glimpse of the living room opposite—low, deeply upholstered chairs, wide sofas, a huge fireplace—before Cathleen entered.

"Come upstairs, father," she said. "I'll show you your room." And she took his suitcase and led the way.

Upstairs, he was shown into a small but luxuriously appointed bed-room, with a silk counterpane on the wide, low, mahogany bed.

"Woodrow is away, of course," Cathleen said as if she were overflowing with the joy of life. "He is hardly ever at home in daytime. You will find hot and cold water here," she added, fingering taps over a porcelain basin set into the wall. "If there is anything else you need, press this button. And then come down. We'll have breakfast together."

John Elliot, left alone, felt it incumbent upon him to hurry. He undid his suitcase and shook out his black Sunday suit. He washed head, face, and beard, hesitated over the embroidered towels, and dressed.

When he had descended again, he had a glimpse of a young lady in black, with white apron, disappearing through a door in the rear of the dining room.

"Ah," Cathleen said, emerging from the shadows of the hall, "there you are, father."

She, too, entered the dining room and pressed a button in the wall.

At once the whole room was flooded with the lights of a many-armed lustre hanging down over the table from a beamed ceiling.

"Sit down, father. Do you care for grapefruit?"

He glanced at the exotic product. "No," he said. "No. Coffee and bread."

She poured his cup. "An egg?" she asked. "A little bacon? No?"

He cleared his throat. "Does your husband own this place?"

"Well," Cathleen said, smiling, "we are buying it."

"Who was that?" he asked, pointing with a nod of his head to the door in the rear of the room.

Cathleen raised her eyebrows. "Oh, the girl, you mean? One of the maids."

"One of them?" he asked sarcastically. "How many have you?"

"Three." Cathleen's face was all smiles. "You mustn't mind these things, father. I know how you feel. I can't help it. I am borne along on a flood."

"Hm," he made grimly.

A shade of sadness went over Cathleen's face. The rest of the meal was eaten in silence. When they rose, Cathleen pressed a button hanging down, by a chain, from the chandelier.

"Let's go over here," she said, leading the way.

They entered the room across the hall.

"No." Cathleen stopped and turned. "Let's go upstairs, father, into the library. We'll be quite undisturbed there."

The library was a large, square room, its walls covered right to the ceiling with books. A large, oaken desk occupied its centre. Half a dozen leather-covered arm-chairs stood about. As in all other rooms, the floor was hidden under a deep-napped carpet. Smoking utensils littered a table.

"Or would you like to sleep, father?"

"No. No." And restlessly he began to pace up and down.

Cathleen dropped into a chair. "Tell me about the folks: John, Isabel, Gladys, Mary, Norman."

"Not much to tell."

"All as usual, I suppose? Making progress?"

"Progress?" he repeated and stopped. "Farmers don't make progress. They make a living."

Cathleen bent forward. "Well, that is what I mean. Making a good living. Making it more easily as time goes by."

He suddenly turned on her. "No," he said. "They are merely spending more money. When they have no crop, they lie low; when they have a crop, they spend. John, that is. Not Isabel. Of Mary I know nothing. Of Gladys less."

"Is that so? Don't they come to see you?"

"Do you?" he asked.

"Oh," she said, "that is different, father!"

"In what way?"

"I have my duties and obligations. We did speak last summer of running up. But Woodrow was asked to deliver some lectures at summer camps. We had to combine business and pleasure."

John Elliot resumed his restless walk. "In the chase for the dollar!" he grumbled. "Where is the child?"

Cathleen left him alone. It was ten minutes before she returned with the little girl now seventeen months old. He took her in his arms and, Cathleen excusing herself, he devoted the rest of the forenoon to the baby, carrying her about and helping her in her first attempts at walking.

There was no connected thought in him; but he felt strangely, mutely happy. Repeatedly he muttered, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

At twelve o'clock a maid came, claiming the child and smiling at the grandfather who looked so much older than he was.

Again he resumed his restless walk. At one o'clock Cathleen came and summoned him for lunch.

"What do you wish to do this afternoon, father?" she asked when they were seated at table. "Would you like to go downtown? Or sleep perhaps?"

He did not answer at once. Now that he had held the baby in his arms, he wanted once more to enjoy the company of his daughter: that was what he had come for, leaving his farm. But he said at last, "I might have a nap," shrugging his shoulders with an abrupt motion.

"You see," Cathleen said, "I shall have to make a

call or two. If you cared to go downtown, to do some shopping or so, I should order a car for you."

"No. No. When does Woodrow come home?"

"Not till suppertime. Nor will Arthur. This happens to be the day on which we are at home in the evening. Some friends and colleagues of Woodrow's usually drop in after supper. Quite informally, you know. For a chat and a cup of tea."

He nodded almost angrily.

"I am glad it so happens," Cathleen went on with a peculiar smile. "Woodrow, you see, is much in demand here in the city, socially and otherwise. He is connected with various enterprises, some of them political; and very little of his time is his own."

"I thought," her father said, "he was teaching at the university."

"He is. But that takes up the least of his time. We could not live on his salary. Or perhaps I should say, it would mean comparative poverty."

"What do they pay him?"

"He has just been raised to thirty-six hundred."

John Elliot clucked his tongue and made a motion with his hand as of protest.

Cathleen smiled. "Yes, I know. I was staggered myself when I first found out how very much things cost. Since then, in a way, I have been working myself."

He threw a brief glance at her. "How?"

"By throwing myself into a continual round of calls and social activities. There is not a day on which I do not attend two or three committee meetings. And when I drop in at some private house for a cup of

tea, what we talk about is business: club business; or the business of some association or other."

John Elliot cleared his throat. His daughter had spoken in a curious voice, half mocking, half as if it all drove her desperate. "Well," he said at last, "do you like that sort of thing?"

"Like it? It has to be done. The moment you try to relax, you drop out of sight. And it is at once reflected in a falling off of income."

"Well . . ." He shrugged his shoulders as if he wished to say something but had thought better of it. Then he changed his mind once more. "It should be possible to live on thirty-six hundred!" His tone only thinly disguised his irony.

"Not this way."

"No."

"You don't understand, father. I'd much rather have a cottage somewhere in the suburbs. But Woodrow would never be satisfied. He needs this continual bustle and excitement. Of course, we did not have this house when we first set up. We lived in a flat. But we began at once to work for a larger suite. Then for a house of our own; and then we bought this."

"Even at that," he said indignantly. "Even at that! This meal!"

Again Cathleen smiled. "Let me tell you, father. A bun and a cup of coffee would do me well enough. But what would the servants think? We have to have servants because other people in our position have them. Having servants, we must live as we do because we must live up to their idea of a household

like this. Nobody is socially quite as exacting as servants."

For the first time since his wife's death John Elliot laughed. And Cathleen was greatly struck by the fact that his laugh was that of an old man. It was a cackle, shrill and discordant; and in emitting it, he coughed and shook his head as if particles of food were choking him. His ordinarily grey face became blotchy with red spots.

When he recovered from this hilarity, he said, moving his hand as if he were thumping the table, "That beats everything I've ever heard! Everything! Living up to the hired girls' idea of yourself! To the hired girls' idea! We call them hired girls, you know."

Cathleen smiled a most peculiar smile. "I know," she said. "I know."

Shortly after, they rose from table; and Cathleen excused herself. "Now, father, I shall have to dress for the street. I am to be in Fort Blanc by three o'clock sharp. If you wish to sleep a little, go to the library and lie down on the lounge. Nobody will disturb you there. Or if you wish to undress, I'll take you to your room."

"Go ahead," he replied. "Go ahead. I'll take care of myself."

For an hour or so he walked up and down, up and down, in the library upstairs.

Now and then he stood at the window and looked out into the whirling snow and at the grey sky which was visible only through the tracery of the leafless,

black boughs of the enormous elm trees which stood in front of the house. These trees were bending and straightening, their tops being lashed by a furious wind. But in that huge and massively built house nothing betrayed—not even a whistling and moaning note—that a blizzard was stalking over the open prairies.

Repeatedly the old man shook his head. With his mind's eye he saw the dug-outs, the sod-cabins of recent settlers in the Saskatchewan hills; and for the first time in his life he thought of poverty with affection.

At last he lay down on the lounge and at once fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

It was pitch-dark when he awoke.

A door had been opened; and a strong, masculine voice asked a question. "Where? The library, did you say? It's dark in here."

A second later lights flashed on all around, in the corners between ceiling and walls.

It took John Elliot several minutes to adjust his perceptions: oh yes, he was in the city, in his son-in-law's house.

"Hello, father," the voice was addressing him. "Welcome! A thousand times welcome!"

John Elliot raised himself and looked at the man who stood before him, tall, broad of shoulder, with a peculiarly square head and dark-blond hair which always seemed to be tousled. About his mobile lips lay a disillusioned smile, tired and weary like that of a business man.

John Elliot took the proffered hand and answered the smile, still blinking.

"Well," Woodrow went on, "I am glad you are here. Very glad. And I hope you will stay for some time, three weeks, a month. I was sorry I could not arrange to meet the train. Well, it is supper time—or dinner time as we call it."

And, as John Elliot watched him, the same peculiar expression which he had seen on his daughter's face made its appearance on the handsome features of this man.

"It's a nuisance," Woodrow went on. "But I've got to dress. I'm just getting home. I'm late. We'll have time to talk at the table. Excuse me."

And he hustled out of the room.

John Elliot found his way to his own room to wash. A few minutes later a gong shook the house.

Some one was knocking at his door.

"Come."

Cathleen peeped in, dressed in a gown of coal-black silk, without jewellery except a small diamond on her throat. Her bust and her arms were bare. To her father she looked like a stranger.

"I see you are ready," she smiled.

"Yes."

She took his arm; and together they descended the wide, carpeted stairway to the lower floor.

At its foot Arthur stood in a plain blue-serge suit, showing his uneven teeth in his smile.

Behind them, Woodrow came down with quick, almost running steps. He was dressed in a short dinner jacket, with the low-cut vest exposing the vast front

of a white, starched shirt. Wherever he appeared, things seemed to assume a bustling gait.

A minute later the four of them were seated at the round table; and Cathleen ladled soup into small cups. A silent, black-gowned waitress, with a small, white apron and with white gloves on her hands, received the cups and placed them before the diners.

Woodrow, with an enormous, almost hurried sigh, seemed to subside into the reposeful quiet of his family circle.

"Well, father, how is John?"

"He's all right."

"No doubt he has plowed his fields and sits by the lamp and reads book after book?"

"Yes."

"And Pete? Have you heard of him lately?"

"No. Not except by letter. No doubt you have heard as much as I have."

"Hardly," Cathleen said. "We don't hear much of any of them. Henrietta was in the city last fall. I tried to keep her here for a while, of course. But she would not stay. She has never written since. I must confess, I thought it was up to her, after she had been here. Though she declined a bed at my house."

"Well," John Elliot said in his staccato way, reading between the lines, for it was no secret to him that Henrietta and Cathleen were antipodal. "Well, Pete was down with pneumonia last summer."

"Last summer?"

"Yes. Yes. Before harvest. He was up again when cutting started."

Cathleen looked at Woodrow. "That must have

been before she was here. She did not even mention it."

Woodrow, pensive, closed an eye at her. John Elliot could only divine that motion from the slight wrinkling of his nose.

He looked at his son who sat opposite him. "Going to be a farmer?" he asked with sudden aggressiveness.

"I don't think so, father." It was said with Arthur's frank, open smile.

"Eh? What?"

"Oh, I don't know yet. Farming is too hard work."

John Elliot's feeling of sudden antagonism was too strong to be suppressed. "You are healthy. That's what God meant you for. Want to be a clerk, eh?"

Arthur's smiling face sobered. He had overheard a word of Cathleen's to her husband. "Yes," she had said, "the old man dominates me. I don't know. He is my father after all. We were all afraid of him while we lived in his house. I confess I am still afraid of him. I should not like to see him in anger." The boy felt that the old man dominated him as well.

John Elliot, longing for a pretext to get angry, wormed himself into that idea suggested only by himself.

"A clerk, eh?" he repeated. "Sell five cents' worth of goods over the counter to any Tom, Dick, or Harry who comes in? And bow with a smile and secretly lick your fingers for more of his dirty cash, eh?"

It was the first outbreak of this kind which Cathleen remembered since she had been a child herself.

She feared that more of it might follow. "We can't all be farmers, father."

"Can't we?" he asked and subsided. As a matter of fact this doctrine was directly opposed to all his instincts. But he had heard, in Cathleen's voice, an echo of the voice of her who was dead. And what she had said was said exactly in the same way in which his wife used to speak when she was "managing" him. "I suppose not," he added. Then, working himself into anger again, for he had to react to his environment, "But I'd like to see a child of mine choosing a man's work at least!"

"The spirit of the times is commercial," Woodrow said.

"Commercial!" John Elliot exploded. "That means, don't *make* a thing. Shave a little piece off it while you are handling it! The spirit of the times! The spirit of nonsense!"

Woodrow nodded his head. "Yes. The spirit of the times is to hunt the most pleasure while dodging hard work."

The rest of the meal proceeded in a commonplace way. When dessert had been served, a clock struck eight, somewhere in the house.

Arthur and Cathleen rose. "Excuse me, father. I have some orders to give."

John Elliot made as if to rise, throwing a quick glance at his son-in-law.

Woodrow detained him by a touch on the arm. He turned to Arthur. "Send us a bottle of port, with two glasses, will you, please?"

When the wine had appeared, Woodrow poured it,

smiling. "Try this, father. You will find it almost, though not quite so good, I flatter myself, as Mrs. Elliot's chokecherry wine which I had the privilege of tasting before her death."

John Elliot sipped of it. "Yes. Almost."

"You know," Woodrow went on, looking as if a mask had dropped from his face, "I am glad we have a moment alone. There is something I'd like to say to you. This is a crazy life to live, this city life of ours! Hurry and bustle all the time! If I followed my own inclination . . . A little cottage somewhere in the country, with a garden and trees all around; or better still, a field! But you know, Cathleen would never be satisfied. She needs this bustle and excitement."

To his amazement, his father-in-law broke into a laugh, a loud, cackling laugh, slapping his knee with short, abrupt motions of his small, dry hand.

As he regained control over himself, he answered Woodrow's astonished look by a shake of his head, wiping his beard and saying nothing but, "No. No!"

Outside, at the door, there was coming and going.

Woodrow rose. "A few guests," he said apologetically. "Mostly men. Colleagues of mine, or men in public life."

They went out into the hall.

Introductions followed; hands were shaken; trivial remarks exchanged.

At once Woodrow was a different man again: he had resumed a mask; he was exaggeratedly gay, artificially witty.

John Elliot watched him while he was speaking to a middle-aged man of medium height and rather distinguished appearance, though his features were like the ruins of a magnificent building: he wore a single eye-glass held by a broad ribbon of black silk.

"What I was going to say, Walpole," Woodrow said, "Mrs. Ormond counts on you for the evening of February nine. It will be no more than a small, informal dinner. You know she is a great admirer of your books; and,"—with a slight touch on the man's shoulder and a broad but sardonic laugh, "considering she is a married woman, she can hardly say any more, can she?"

The stranger bowed, including Cathleen in his acknowledgment. She was hovering in the background.

More and more men arrived, all in evening suits.

Introductions . . .

Some of them tried to speak to John Elliot; but, finding that the topics which they touched upon awakened no response, they soon passed on.

An hour or so went by. The men began to smoke; in a small room adjoining the "salon" drinks were poured.

John Elliot sat in a corner, with Woodrow in front of him, the centre of a small group of listeners. Involuntarily John Elliot lent an ear.

"The trouble, to my mind, is this," Woodrow said. "I agree that there are already, in our towns, on our farms, plenty of young men growing up for whom there is, at the present stage of development, practically no work in the country. As the free homestead land is being exhausted, it becomes increasingly

difficult to find farms for them. Land has to be bought and is high in price. They do not want to go into outlying districts. They are spoiled by their early environment of comparative comfort. They are pleasure seekers. Our immigration policy supplies town and city with labour which is cheaper and less fastidious than that of the native Canadian. But the prosperity of the cities is the obvious, I might almost say, the spectacular thing; the thing that strikes the eye. And this prosperity, especially in the east, depends very largely on the prosperity of the great transportation companies. It is admittedly more profitable to bring a settler or a labourer from Sweden, Germany, Russia, than to pick him up, let me say, at Fisher Landing, Manitoba."

At this moment a small young man with an old man's face bowed to John Elliot.

"Mr. Elliot," he said, sitting down by his side, "I wish to ask you a question. I might say that I am engaged in writing the early history of the west; the history of its first settlement. In compiling my data, I have run across the name of Elliot in the Arkwright district of Manitoba. An Elliot settled there in the early days, in the Red River valley, immigrating from Ontario in 1865. Are you by any chance related to that Elliot?"

John Elliot cleared his throat and squared his shoulders. His answer sounded as if he spat it out. "That Elliot was my father."

The young man was interested, greatly interested. Would Mr. Elliot be kind enough to answer a few questions, to give a few facts? "You know, if there

had been an historian on board the *Mayflower*, we should now have a sort of aristocracy of lineage in the U.S.A. I hope you agree with me if I say that that would be a good thing. An aristocracy of lineage instead of the vulgar aristocracy of money. My book is to be written with that sort of thing in view. One day the Elliots of Arkwright . . ."

"Now of Sedgeby, Saskatchewan."

"Sedgeby, you said?"

"Yes, the Manitoba line became extinct with the death of my older brother."

And suddenly John Elliot was answering questions, telling stories and anecdotes. He was sitting bolt upright in his chair, much enlivened.

Meanwhile other guests arrived. Woodrow who was listening with one ear to his father-in-law nodded to them with a smile. Cathleen moved in and out.

A single woman had appeared, a bold woman of great and striking beauty, black of hair which was smoothly brushed close to the skull, bare of snow-white bust and shoulders, with arms of plump roundness and fingers flashing with rings; about her columnar neck hung a triple string of pearls.

As she heard the old man holding forth in the corner, she stopped with an imperious gesture as if she were imposing silence on every one and listened.

"Yes," John Elliot was saying. "Yes. I remember the first crop of wheat. We had to take it to Fort Garry. There was no regular buying agency yet. We hauled it in wagons from near the international boundary, sixty miles or more. Eight wagons of sixty bushels each. Once we had to unload to cross the

Roseau River. The bottom was muddy. We hitched ten horses to a single wagon and took twenty bushels at a time. Thus we pulled it all over. Fort Garry was a mere village. It was the Hudson's Bay that bought. The trip took three days each way. And when we got there, they gave us thirty cents a bushel. But there was not enough cash to pay all applicants; so we had to take half in kind. Up to a certain sum we could choose whatever we liked, tea, coffee, sugar. But the balance we had to take in salt fish. When we had loaded our purchases and put our money away in our belts, we drove south again. But when we were ten miles from town, we dumped the fish and left it to rot; for we had no use for it. But of that we had not thought before. All we were after was the fifteen cents cash. And we thought ourselves marvelously rich. It was our first real profit. Yes, sir. The country's grown up on thirty-cent wheat. But now they can't make a living getting a dollar."

He paused.

A murmur of admiration went around the assembly which, however, broke up once more into the animated discussions of smaller groups.

The imperious lady swept up to John Elliot's side. Cathleen slipped forward, murmuring an introduction.

John Elliot stared at the woman out of his small, sharp eyes. It took him some time to recall himself from the visions of the past. Her clothes, her jewellery were worth a fortune. Everything about her looked as if it were designed to underline her sex.

"What?" he said to himself, "is the minx trying to entangle me in her meshes?"

"That was wonderful, Mr. Elliot," she said. "Wonderful! I just see that. You must know I am writing."

"Writing?" he repeated with a frown. "What for?"

"I can't help it," she said. "It is stronger than I am. No book of mine has been published yet. The publishers won't have them. The peculiar thing is that my ambition is to write about pioneers."

"Do you know them?"

"That's the trouble. I don't. Your story was an inspiration."

"Go," he commanded, "and attend to your duties as a wife and a mother."

"Oh!" She lifted her beautiful arms. "I have no children, Mr. Elliot. And a household runs itself these days. I sit at my desk and I write."

He rose. Again, as he spoke, he seemed to spit his words out. "Bear children," he said. "And write about that if write you must."

With a look of fury in his eyes he turned away.

"Excuse me," he said to the young man who tried to detain him. "I am tired. I spent last night in the train."

Cathleen had seen him and came to his aid. She took his arm and led him away.

"You wish to lie down, father?"

"Yes. Yes."

But he found his room too close and warm, his bed too soft.

He spent an almost sleepless night and rose next

morning at six o'clock. He was in an execrable humour and hated himself for giving in to it; but that only made it worse.

The house through which he groped his way downstairs was dark and dead. He tried to find the light switch, but did not succeed. So, after several fruitless attempts, he returned to his room and searched in his suitcase till he found a railroad folder. Thumb-ing it wrathfully, he looked for the proper time table and discovered that, if he left at eight-thirty, he could make connections at an intermediate point so as to reach Fisher Landing at five in the afternoon.

Once more he went into the dark hall and coughed, making as much noise as he could in this place where everything was designed to deaden all noises.

Nothing stirred.

He returned into his room and slammed the door; but even the doors were, by some contrivance, so constructed as to slam without a sound.

A few minutes later, nevertheless, there was a knock at his door.

"Come," he shouted.

Cathleen slipped in, clad in a silk wrapper, her hair in curlers.

"Good morning, father. I am so sorry you got up before any one else. You would like some breakfast. I'll call Woodrow and Arthur."

"Let them sleep. Let them sleep."

"But you are hungry."

"Yes. Yes, I am."

"I believe the cook is up. I'll be down in five minutes. If she isn't, I'll make the coffee myself."

"If you'll turn the light on," he said somewhat less wrathfully. "So I can find my way."

She did; and he went downstairs.

He turned into the dining room and thence into the kitchen, fingering once more for the light switch. The whole house was warm. He had fully intended to light a fire and to prepare his own breakfast; but he was so bewildered by what he found that, with a return of his anger, he shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. There were nothing but electric ranges and gas-stoves in this house!

Upstairs, in his room, he packed his suitcase.

While engaged in this task, he heard the first sound in the house. On the floor above muffled footfalls became audible. Impatiently he waited for half an hour. Then, carrying his suitcase, he went down the stairs once again.

In the hall he ran into Cathleen who had done up her hair and slipped on a kimono.

"Father!" she cried, "you are not going away?"

"Yes. My train leaves at eight-thirty."

"Father! No! You are not going to do that to me!"

"I can't stay. I must get home. There's the stock to look after."

"Well, surely, John attends to that!"

"Oh, John!"

Cathleen stared at him, tears in her eyes.

Woodrow and Arthur came down.

"Is breakfast ready?" the old man asked, entering the dining room with his short, staccato steps. And, as if in an impulse of unconquerable meanness, he

added, "If it's inconvenient, I can have a cup of coffee at the station, of course."

"Nonsense," Cathleen said and ran into the kitchen. At the door she turned back. "The table is set. Sit down, father. Woodrow, Arthur, sit down."

As they did so, Woodrow said apologetically, "You must excuse us, father. We are not used to the early hours of the farm. We should have thought . . ."

John Elliot's muttered answer was unintelligible.

Cathleen entered with the steaming coffee pot of polished silver on a tray. Her eyes were red.

As John Elliot, in his frugal way, partook of coffee and toast, his mood softened.

"I want to drop in on Henrietta on my way home," he said. "And I am needed on the farm."

Cathleen fought her tears down. "I can't understand it. Because we happen to live differently, my own people treat me as if we were lepers!"

"It takes all kinds of people to make a world," her father said with an attempt at facetiousness.

After that the meal was taken in silence.

When it was finished, John Elliot looked at his big silver watch.

"When do I have to start to make the station by eight-fifteen?"

"Quarter to eight," Woodrow said.

It was half past seven.

"Do I take a street car?"

"I'll drive you over," Woodrow volunteered.

While the others got themselves ready, John Elliot walked up and down in the hall. Every half minute he looked at his watch.

Then the car appeared in front of the house. Day had dawned, bright and clear.

Woodrow and Arthur sat in front; Cathleen helped her father into the back seat and followed him, wrapped in her furs.

John Elliot's angry and irritable mood did not subside till they reached the station. There, having bought his ticket, he felt somewhat rueful, as if he should apologise for his abrupt departure.

Cathleen stood stiff and cold by the side of her father's suitcase which he had deposited in the centre of the huge hall. Although Woodrow and Arthur were with her, she looked forlorn.

Her father, returning to the group, could not apologise in any other way but by attempting to be facetious once more. "Well, now, you think I am a queer one!"

But Woodrow waved a comprehending hand. "I quite understand. Don't say a word. You know what I said to you last night after supper. The open fields—a cottage! I understand."

They went forward into the subway below the tracks.

A kiss—handshakings; and he was gone.

Man and boy looked at each other; the young woman fought with her tears.

CHAPTER IX

PETE SAWS WOOD

DURING the nine hours which John Elliot spent in the train, he remained almost entirely under the influence of the parting moments. He sincerely pitied his child.

He was angry with himself. And yet, in leaving the house from which he came, he had acted under a compulsion stronger than his will. So, after a while, his anger changed into self-pity.

He thought of the time when his family had still been intact; yes, of the time, resurrected in his memory by last night's discussion, before his children had been born. As they had arrived, one by one, and grown into adolescence, he had been an autocrat, hard to please perhaps, not easy to get along with. But why had he been autocratic? From temper? From a high value placed on his own pleasure? He would not admit it.

Since, in that dim past, he had always, either before or after, justified his every action, at the stern tribunal of his puritanical conscience, by a reference to the ultimate welfare of his family, he was now, in retrospection, able to discount the part which temper and natural disposition had undoubtedly played in his conduct.

As compared with the unsatisfactory and chaotic present, that dim past seemed to have been a time

of great and almost undisturbed happiness. Why?

And slowly he seemed to find and to lay bare the reason.

Through all his activities, then, a single purpose had run: the purpose of honourably raising his family, a large family at that. His favourite story from the Bible had been that of Abraham and his house; often he had repeated to himself the lines, "In blessing I will bless thee; and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Never had he, in these lines, seen or sought for evidences of verbal revelation; purely theological thought had been unknown to him. He had taken them simply as an expression of the marvel of fruitful propagation.

That single purpose had coordinated all things for him, had justified them, had seemed to transform his whole life with all its ramifications into a single, organic whole with a clear and unmistakable meaning. In that purpose he and his wife had been one; and so they had been fruitful and had multiplied. It was the children's duty to conform, to become like them; and, therefore, to obey them in all things, so as to multiply the seed themselves one day; so as not to let the strand thus created perish. To live honourably, to till the land, and to hand on life from generation to generation: that was man's duty; that, to him, in spite of all doubts, had meant and still meant serving God. Doubt had existed only as to details: it had never gnawed at the root of the fundamentals.

Why had he been so deeply antagonised by what he had seen in the city?

Because, within his own seed, he had seen a departure from that great purpose. Because his own child and her chosen husband saw the end of their lives—if they saw any at all—in what he considered to be inessentials. What were politics, what were the acquisition of wealth, the striving after luxuries—what were even so-called science and civilisation in comparison with that greater, nobler end: the handing on of life and the living of that life in the “service of God”?

Empires rose and fell: kings and high priests strove with each other: wars were fought: ripples on the sea of life. Underneath, deep down, that life itself went on as it had gone on in Abraham’s time: the land was tilled to grow our daily bread. And this life, the life of the vast majority of men on earth, was the essential life of all mankind. The city with its multifarious activities was nothing but a bubble on that sea.

He was proud of belonging to the hidden ground-mass of the race which carried on essential tasks, no matter under what form of government, no matter under what conditions of climate and soil: he had lived and multiplied; he had grown, created, not *acquired* his and his children’s daily bread: he had served God.

Death? Grass grew and was trodden down. Man was born, lived, and had to die, living on in his children and in the example which he had set. Between birth and death, in the short spell of life, there was,

in addition, the blessing and good gift of human companionship, side by side on an endless road. Why was he alone? He had been deserted! His own children had deserted him.

Whence his anger with Cathleen?

He did not see, perhaps, that the single woman to appear at last night's reception had, in his mental view of his daughter, tinged his verdict of her, yes, had almost taken her place in his thought. To his eye it appeared that she, Cathleen, was like a field in eternal fallow. In her, all his children seemed to blend: and all were sterile.

And she was plainly beyond his reach; she had gone out from her father's house and sought other realms. If he scolded her, he could at best antagonise her as she had antagonised him: he could never draw her back within the fold. Thence his self-pity.

He had failed in the achievement of the second dream of his life. Half the purpose of his whole existence was gone. His children were scattered over two provinces of this country; they had freed themselves of the paternal rule: they were rebels in the house of their father: their aims were not what his aims had been. Their lives were evil; their lives were chaos; and through their lives, his own was chaos.

When he alighted from the train at Fisher Landing, he stood for a moment on the platform of the station, blinded by the glare of the snow in the setting sun.

He looked about for some one to receive him; and only then did it occur to him that he had neither writ-

ten nor in any other way announced his coming. Cathleen and Henrietta did no longer correspond with each other; not even in a round-about way could news of his trip have reached the Harringtons.

He took a tighter hold on his grip and was on the point of starting downtown. The greater part of the village lay peacefully scattered, in the evening light, over the hills on the other side of a little river which presented a level, snow-covered plain in the valley to the south. A single street skirted the north bank of Fisher Creek.

It was bitterly cold.

Unreasonably, John Elliot felt neglected.

He stopped after a few steps and stood, musing. He would stay overnight at the hotel in town and leave tomorrow morning without even seeing his daughter!

Just then the train pulled out, with a clanging noise of couplings, puffing, and throwing huge, convoluted domes of steam into the frosty air.

Beyond the train stood a line of freight cars one of which was loaded with cord wood. In front of its slide-door stood a sleigh with a wood-rack; and a tall, strong man in a shabby sheep-skin coat was unloading it.

That man was Pete.

In a sudden reversal of his feelings John Elliot walked across the track.

Pete looked up. A smile flashed over his face; and, pulling his mitt off his right hand, he jumped to the ground.

"Well, well!" he called, "that looks like father!"

They shook hands.

"Quite a surprise!" Pete said while he replaced his mitt. His voice betrayed that embarrassment which overcomes us when we wish to be friendly and cannot at once hit upon an adequate topic for conversation. "Well, what do you want to do? Shall I get you a team to take you out?"

"When do you go home yourself?"

"I've two or three more cords to unload. I can't knock off very well. If I don't empty that car to-night, they'll charge me five dollars demurrage. And I have promised the saw for tomorrow."

"Go ahead," John Elliot said. "I'll help. I'll stay with you."

"No-o! You aren't dressed for work."

"Never mind." And stiffly the older man lifted his suitcase to be deposited in the freight-car and climbed upon the half completed load. He reached for a cord-wood stick.

Pete laughed and followed him, falling to work again himself.

A few minutes later they finished the load. Pete pulled the blankets from the horses' backs, folded them up, and threw them on the load, one for himself and one for his father-in-law to sit on.

As he drove down, from the track, to the bridge across the river, and up again, on the other side, into a residential street, and finally, by a lane, into the back yard of a house, he sat as if brooding.

Then, while they unloaded, Pete asked the usual questions. "How is John! How are Harvey and Frank?"

John Elliot, as was usual with him, gave monosyllabic answers.

And again they sat on the empty rack, driving back to the freight-yard.

"Are you in the wood business?" John Elliot asked.

"Yes," Peter replied absent-mindedly. "The way I figure is this. For five or six months of the year the farmer is the busiest man on earth. The rest of the time he goes idle. Unless you call feeding stock work."

John Elliot nodded.

"Well," Pete went on, somewhat ironically, "there isn't a trade on earth in which you can make a living by working half the time. I know I can't."

John Elliot had something to say to that; but he did not say it. If God had ordained things that way, perhaps there was a meaning in it, a purpose?

As they reached the station, Pete pointed upward to a hill, north of it, the brow of which was crowned with a large, green-painted house embedded in a bluff, a mile and a half or two miles away. "That's my place," he said.

They piled their load.

When they drove south again, Pete went on speaking as if there had been no interruption. "Sometimes I get tired. So tired that I'd like to quit. You know I've been ill. Funny thing to be seriously ill. It's restful, you know. You reach a point where you don't care. You think; and life seems a silly thing. You almost wish you'd go to sleep and not wake again."

John Elliot looked at him. That was an old man's thought.

The sun had sunk. Dusk filled the valley, a cold, wintry dusk. The great hollow in which the town lay resembled the hollow in Saskatchewan; only that here the hills were crowned with forests running down their flanks; and the streets of the town were lined with trees. The huge town-bell rang. It was six o'clock.

Again they unloaded. On the way back to the station Pete asked, "Are you getting hungry? Had we better take a bite at the hotel?"

"No. Let's finish."

They loaded a third time and, recrossing the river, they went uphill, along its south bank, for over a mile. At last they entered a yard above the town, half rural, half urban.

They had hardly begun unloading there when, from the backdoor of the house, a medium-sized man emerged, shouldering, as he did so, into a short coat.

"Hello, Pete," he said as he approached. "I see you're bringing wood. I don't need it."

"I know, Mack," Pete answered. "It wasn't ordered. But neither do I need the money just now. You'll be wanting wood about the first of the month. Leave it lie. I'll be needing money just about that time."

"All right. Had your supper?"

"No."

"Come in. Have a cup of tea."

"Shake hands with Mr. Elliot, my father-in-law. Oh, I guess we better not."

"Sure. Come on. Don't be fussy."

"Well . . ." And Pete looked at John Elliot.

"It's the last load. You'll be going home after that."

"Yes," Pete said. "But it'll be a long while till supper yet." And, with a sudden expression of grimness, he added, "I'm baching it."

"Baching it? Isn't Henrietta at home?"

"She's at home. But . . . She don't cook for me just now. Might just as well know. You'll see it anyway."

The shocking feature of it was that a stranger was standing by.

For a moment the three men looked in silence at the ground, their faces serious and set.

Then the stranger repeated, "Come in, both of you. I am sure Mrs. Mack has set the table meanwhile, in the kitchen, the way you like it."

"Come on," Pete said to his father-in-law.

They entered and had tea, with fried potatoes and meat.

Mr. Mackenzie made conversation, asking John Elliot about his home province.

When, half an hour later, they were sitting once more on the rack of the sleigh, John Elliot asked, "How long have things been that way?"

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Almost from the beginning. Off and on."

They fetched the suitcase from the freight car and took the hill road north, out of town.

John Elliot mused. He remembered a word of his wife's, said to him more than ten years ago. "John, I cannot help feeling that Hennie's life is going to be a tragedy." This had been said from her

intuitive knowledge of the character of the girl. And he also thought of the fact that his wife and he, at the very outset of their married life, had agreed in a common aversion to endearing diminutives of names. Yet, when Henrietta had reached her fifteenth or sixteenth year, his wife had suddenly begun to call her Hennie instead of Henrietta. One day he had asked for the reason. "Oh John," his wife had answered, "somehow I know that the girl is going to suffer much in her life. Of all the children she has least to boast of in prettiness or disposition. Let's give her, while we can, such trifling compensations!"

Pete spoke. It was quite dark now; there was no light except from the stars.

"I want to prepare you," he said. "In spite of everything Hennie is in the family way."

"Eh?" John Elliot was profoundly shocked.

Pete laughed. "You may well be astonished. But don't try to interfere. No use! It would make things worse. Don't say a word. Least of all now when she's in that condition."

"Is that what you need the money for?"

"No. I'll tell you. When she accepted me, she made her terms. I promised to pay her twenty-five dollars a month. When it's due, she demands it. And if I can't pay it, she leaves my house. Not that that matters; at least not to me any longer. But the children, you know!"

Chaos! Chaos!

In the yard he waited till Pete had put the horses in the barn.

The house stood in the snow-bound bluff, quiet and

home-like: a shelter in the bitter night. All windows were dark but one.

At last Pete had finished. He closed the big slide-door of the barn and opened his lantern, raising it to the height of his head to blow it.

They went to the back door of the house and, through a shed, entered the kitchen. Pete struck a match and lighted a lamp. It was a large and well-appointed room.

Pete peeled himself out of his sheep-skin.

Nobody stirred.

"Let me take your coat."

And he carried it into the hall in front.

Then a voice—Henrietta's, "Is there any one with you?"

"Yes. Your father's here."

And without another word Pete went upstairs.

At the same moment the door of the parlour was opened; and Henrietta stepped into the hall. She was tall and stout; her dress of dark purple stuff fell loosely about her.

"Well," she said excitedly in her somewhat raucous voice which had always sounded as if it were running away with her. "I declare! Father! When did you arrive?"

And with quick, imperious steps she came to him, bending down for the kiss.

He did not reply. A lump in his throat interfered with his control over his voice.

"Come in," she went on and turned.

When he entered the parlour, it seemed less large than he had expected. Its furniture, too, was plainer

than he had anticipated; it reminded him of his own in days gone-by.

"Sit down, father," Henrietta urged. It was easily seen that the surprise affected her heart. "When did you arrive? Have you had your supper?"

"Yes," he said. "I came by the train."

"Well, and why did you not come up right away?"

"I met Pete."

"Oh!"—as if chilled.

A few seconds' silence. Then a flood of questions regarding John, Isabel, Gladys, Norman, Mary.

He answered briefly; and at last he rose and paced up and down, the way his daughter had known him to do in the past.

She smiled. "You are just as you always were, father."

"Why should I be changed?"

"We all change. But you don't."

He cleared his throat, with an ominous sound.

Another short silence.

"I understand!" Henrietta said. "Pete's been talking."

Her father looked at her.

"Yes," Henrietta went on. "I know. I know." Then, with a shrug of her shoulders, "I suppose you have lived long enough to know that there are two sides to every question."

"Yes," he said in his staccato way. "Yes. I am waiting. What is your side?"

Henrietta laughed—a curious, defensive, almost deterrent laugh, as if she meant to sketch unspeakable things into the air. She flicked one foot up and

down, tapping with the sole of her shoe the toe of the other. The light of the floor lamp fell over her shoulder.

"I suppose," she said at last, "I was born under an unlucky star. When my nature was compounded, one ingredient was left out by mistake. Sweetness. Who is to blame? I? I am I. I can't help myself. I'll tell you, father. Pete had courted me for more than ten years before I consented. I should have known if he didn't. If he'd been a small man, or a pliant man, or a man so rich that we could afford a house large enough . . ." Her high-flung voice trailed off into silence.

"Large enough?"

"Yes, yes," she said impatiently. "Large enough that we wouldn't need to meet unless we wished to. However! Things are as they are. We've got to make the best of them, I suppose."

"Seems to me," he said and stopped, "you are making the worst of them."

"Perhaps. Perhaps. Why does he not let me go? I've offered to go. I've even gone."

"Where are the children?" her father asked irrelevantly. He was seeking for a diversion; he had had a glimpse into a self-tortured nature; no lovely sight.

"The children? Why don't you say, the brats? They're upstairs." Her voice had been harsh. Without any transition she burst into tears, crying convulsively and dabbing now and then at her eyes with her handkerchief.

John Elliot felt nothing but pity now, nothing but

sympathy with this child of his as she suddenly appeared again since she cried. He stood by her side and stroked her hair, uttering little, consoling sounds of which he was quite unconscious.

She rose and dropped her head on his shoulder. He patted her back.

When she quieted down, he said, "Let me see them."

She took the lamp and led the way.

Henrietta had made up his bed on a lounge in the parlor. He slept; but again his sleep was broken. In the morning, he had long lain awake, deeply puzzled by he knew not what, when he heard that somebody was stirring in the house. He rose in the dark, found his clothes, and dressed.

In the kitchen, Pete was busy at the stove.

"I've got to get the saw out early," he said. "Besides, I can't sleep once I wake up. I always rise between four and five."

John Elliott nodded. "So do I."

At five o'clock, Pete having fed his horses, the two of them had breakfast in the kitchen. John Elliot had not put on his Sunday clothes; he had not even opened his suitcase.

"Have you a spare sheep-skin?" he asked.

"An old one. Yes. Why?"

"I want to go with you."

"All right. Wait till I get the furnace filled."

While he waited in the kitchen, John Elliot walked up and down again, up and down. He was surprised at himself that he did not leave at once; for he

wished he were back at home. But Pete's life was a life which he understood.

Pete returned; and together they went out into the frosty morning.

The trees stood stark and stiff, reaching up into the hollow night. Orion was sinking to the western edge of the world.

In the stable, John Elliot stood, shivering at the thought of the cold outside. Pete threw the harness over the horses, leaving their blankets on them for protection underneath.

Then, before he led the horses out, he returned to the yard and fumbled with stiffening fingers at the gas-engine of the circular saw. The whole outfit was mounted on skids. The light of the lantern which stood on one of the skids illumined his figure, drawing it in sharp lights and shadows, as alternately he bent and straightened his back. His sheep-skin coat hung unbuttoned about him.

By seven o'clock, it being still quite dark, the valley in which Fisher Landing nestled echoed with the screams of the saw. Pete and his father-in-law went from place to place, sawing one cord here and two or three cords there.

Most of the time they worked in silence, exchanging no more than a word now and then; and that had reference to the work in hand.

As the morning advanced and daylight came, the town awoke. The householders in whose yards they worked came out, looking on and talking to Pete. Invariably, their talk was friendly; Pete's answers were quick and productive of laughter. His jokes, how-

ever, were pointless to John Elliot, for they hinged on the knowledge of local conditions.

In the yard of one of the doctors—Dr. Stanhope was his name—they found a huge pile of poles containing fifteen or twenty cords. Poles are harder to handle than cord-wood sticks; and every now and then Pete who did most of the lifting would pause and open his sheep-skin coat in order to cool himself. By that time the sky had clouded over again; a bleak wind was blowing.

On one such occasion the doctor, vigorous, ruddy, his face flushed by liquor, stepped out of his office and shouted across the yard to Pete.

"Hey there, Pete! The devil take you! Do you want to have another attack of pneumonia? Button that coat of yours up!"

Pete laughed. "Suppose I like pneumonia?" he shouted back. "Get in there and shut that office door!" But he obeyed the doctor's orders.

Dinner they took at the hotel. Pete tried to persuade his father-in-law to go up the hill and rest. John Elliot refused.

Thus they went on again, working through the dreary, cold, mid-winter afternoon till night settled down over the valley.

When they stopped at last, Pete said, "Another day gone. You hardly notice how the time slips by, day after day. You get up and lie down, day after day."

"You work too hard," John Elliot said.

Pete, with an absent look, shrugged his shoulders. "I don't mind the work. But the days go by, and the weeks, and the months. And nothing comes of it."

At the house, Henrietta was waiting.

"Why didn't you come home for dinner at least, father? Come in. Come in, Pete."

And they sat down to a chicken supper.

Over Pete's irregular features played an ironical smile.

During the night another blizzard began to blow, shaking the house and whistling and moaning through the bluff.

John Elliot grew exceedingly restless.

In the early morning, when Pete rose to look after the fires, his father-in-law entered the kitchen. While the preparations for breakfast went on, he looked as if he were on the point of an explosion. But he sat down with Pete and partook of coffee and toast.

"What are you going to do?" he asked when they had finished.

"Collect money. If the storm dies down, I'll saw again."

"I am going home."

"Today?"

"Yes."

Pete lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders; but he raised no objection. "Well, you go south, I suppose? There are two trains, one at nine, and one at three."

John Elliot nodded.

"It's been pleasant," Pete said. "Good-by, then."

"Good-by."

And they shook hands in an almost perfunctory way.

When Pete had left, John Elliot paced the kitchen with his short, angry steps which were so well known to all his children. He muttered and nodded to himself, worrying his grey beard with one hand and flinging the other sideways, in quick gestures of mingled protest and appeal.

An hour or so later, Henrietta came down; and after a short greeting he did not speak again till she began a broken, desultory conversation.

"How did you rest, father?"

"Badly."

"The wind and the noise?"

"Yes, the wind."

"And so you've been down to Cathleen's, have you?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Cathleen," she said with sudden asperity, "seems to have been the wise one among us girls."

He grunted half questioningly.

"How long did you stay?"

"A day or so."

Henrietta laughed. "Well, I do hope, father, you are going to stay longer with me."

"No," he said. "No. I am leaving today. If I can get down to the station."

"Today?" Henrietta repeated, almost speechless.

"Yes."

"Surely not?"

He threw her a short, testy glance as if to silence her.

"It's hardly worth the money it costs to come down from Saskatchewan for a single day."

"It's worth the money to get back."

For a long while, after that, hardly a word was said. Henrietta went about her work, preparing breakfast for herself and heating milk for the children. Her father walked up and down, up and down, drawing his watch every few minutes and stopping now and then at one of the windows to look out into the drifting snow. It was nearly eight o'clock.

At last he went to the door, opened it, and stepped out. The wind seemed to snatch the very breath from his lips and to chill him to the bones.

"No," he said when he returned inside. "It's impossible to make it afoot. Pete's gone, I suppose?"

"I suppose so. He goes no matter what the weather is. He will never take care of himself."

John Elliot shot her a glance and resumed his impatient walk.

Henrietta brought the children down and bent over the basket-crib into which she had placed them side by side.

"When does that train leave?" her father asked suddenly.

Henrietta straightened. "The train? You don't mean to say you wanted the morning train?"

"The storm's too wild."

"There is no connection. The first train west which you can get at Brandon leaves at seven o'clock at night."

"I know. I know." And he resumed his walk.

Henrietta worked herself into a fury.

"Say, father," she said at last, with the unmistakable intention to wound, "if it's the morning train

you wanted,—it is due to leave at nine—it won't take me more than five minutes to hitch a horse to the cutter."

Instead of an answer, he went to the parlour where he had slept, fetched his suitcase, and carried it into the kitchen where he deposited it by the door.

Tears trembled in Henrietta's eyes. "All right. If that's the way you feel, you would not have needed to come."

And angrily she went into the hall of the house, jerked a fur coat and a man's fur cap down, slipped into them, returned to the kitchen, covered the twins warmly in their cribs, gave them their bottles, reached for a pair of mitts, and went out.

John Elliot stood and hesitated, looking after her. Then he fetched his own coat, put it on, took his suitcase, and fought his way against the wind to the stable, following her.

She was harnessing a horse, and he lent a hand.

Five minutes later the horse was hitched to the cutter, and they climbed in. The road to the station led all the way downhill; and they were driving with the wind. They covered the distance in little more than a quarter of an hour.

"Well," Henrietta said, with her sharp, raucous voice and that ironical intonation which barely disguised her anger, "good-by, father. Thanks for the visit. The train may be late. But I can't wait. The children, you know."

He raised his bristling cheek; she touched it with her lips; and a moment later he stood alone on the station platform.

Here, in the shelter of the hills, the wind blew less furiously, though there lay an air of barren and wind-swept cold all over the landscape.

He deposited his suitcase by the side of the door to the waiting room, entered, bought his ticket, and came out again.

As he paced the platform, stamping his feet now and then, he was a prey to a peculiar mixture of feelings. He was a little sorry for Henrietta. Again there was, in the background of his mind, the memory of what his wife had said about the girl. He felt great sympathy with Pete. He would have liked to fathom the mystery between the two. Yet, how could there be any mystery? They were man and wife. Let them make the best of their situation!

But most of all he was angry; he felt aggrieved. If the way he behaved to his children did not suit them, well, they were his children! It was their duty to look for reasons! This morning he had simply wanted to be coaxed to stay, that was all. Had Henrietta coaxed him, he would have stayed, perhaps, for the three o'clock train.

CHAPTER X

FRED PULLS UP HIS STAKES

ONE day, next spring, John Elliot senior went over to his son's field. In the fall, John had not had time to do much plowing. It had taken him much longer than his father to finish his harvest, for his crop had been spread over so much greater an area. Spring had opened up late; and so, when his father had finished seeding and was already working his summer-fallow, John was still far behind; and finally, as he had so often done before, he simply disked last year's stubble to prepare a seed-bed.

John Elliot looked about and shook his head. Then he said angrily, "What kind of work is that! You are trying to cheat the land. The land can't be fooled!"

John junior turned on the seat of his plow with a weary sigh. "Yea," he said. "I know. I can't help it. If we get rain, I'll have a crop. If we don't get rain, I won't. It's a gamble. Times change, father, and we've got to change with them."

"Pshaw!" his father made. He was all the angrier since he saw that John was half convinced of the justice of his reproach. "Times change! Nonsense! What do you mean by that? You change, and you call it the times! Use your common sense, and the times are all right."

"Yea," John junior drawled. "It's easy to talk, father."

His father frowned darkly. "To talk! It seems to me I do more than talking!"

"Sure," John agreed. "But you've your way, I've mine. It's as broad as it is long. What I mean when I say, times change? I'll tell you. Farming's becoming an industry. The chief problem is one of finance."

"Finance!" the old man fumed. "Farming is what it has always been. But you whippersnappers of to-day are not satisfied to make a home and a living on the farm; you want to make money!"

"Sure!" John agreed again. "You've hit on the difference. We want to make money like everybody else."

"And you'll land in the bankruptcy court!" his father said impatiently; and, forgetting what he had come for, he turned back to the road.

Shortly after, Isabel came down with twins. Isabel, too, was isolated by this time. Lillian had never encouraged her visits, in spite of the fact that Isabel had been the only one of the sisters to call at her place. Not once had Lillian gone to Harvey's. Gladys lived too far away for familiar intercourse.

Her father seemed to notice that Isabel was coarsening from month to month.

Just how matters stood at her house, was hard to tell. She was secretive about it. At the time of her trial she was all alone, with nobody to look after her but old Mrs. Harvey; for Kenneth had gone to Kicking Horse to get the doctor who arrived too late.

Mrs. Harvey stayed only five days and then returned to town, for her husband, in an attempt to fight off old age, had taken to his bed and could not be left alone. So, after five days of rest, Isabel went to work again, with twins on her hand.

John Elliot went to see her; but he had the impression that she, too, did not intend to encourage calls. He left some money with her, though, which she at first declined and then accepted, saying, "Well, it will solve some of my problems just now."

How the Harveys lived was a puzzle. Kenneth did a little farming; but on his father's place, not his own. On his own place he pastured cattle. "Cattle!" John Elliot said wrathfully. "In the short-grass country! Where it takes thirty acres pasturage per head!"

Sometimes, when two or three of the family were assembled somewhere, the brothers and sisters debated the question whether Kenneth was lazy or merely slow.

To his father-in-law he remained a stranger.

Norman still worked in town. He had assimilated town ways and mannerisms of speech. "This is the life, father," he said. "There's nothing in the world like pulling an engine apart and setting her up again. That's all I care for."

"I can't understand it," John Elliot grumbled. "To be taking orders from others when he could be a king in his own right out on the farm!"

Frank and Gladys seemed to be getting along somewhat better of late. Gladys, on her occasional visits at home, invariably scrubbed the whole ground floor

of her father's house. He was beginning to have "a sweet tooth"; and she baked "cookies" and cakes for him. If he was at home on such occasions or dropped in at the house, leaving his field work, she would talk of her and Frank's affairs as quite flourishing. When her father hinted that Frank had made little progress, considering that he had been on his farm now for thirteen years, she defended him. "No, father," she said, "you can't say that. At least he has always made a living for himself and for me and the children." And, with a dark look and a mysterious shaking of her thin head, she would add, "That is more than can be said of some people!" Whom she hinted at, her father could guess; the Harveys, of course.

Margaret who was still teaching wrote home in June, announcing that she had passed her examinations on the first-year Arts course in the University of Manitoba. "By the way," she added, "you know, of course, that Henrietta has a girl? Her name is Juanita."

A girl? Juanita? How was that pronounced?

But John Elliot sat down that night and wrote his second oldest daughter a letter of congratulation.

Arthur reported a pass on his second year of the high-school course.

The summer went by. John Elliot's children—those who still lived about Sedgeby—were agreed, on the rare occasions when two or three of them met, that the "old man" had become still "queerer" since his short visit in Manitoba. They speculated about the change in him.

When fall came and the harvest was garnered, he had a good crop. John junior's was "middling." Isabel and Gladys, when asked about theirs, shrugged their shoulders.

Yet, Frank bought a car.

John Elliot senior looked on with suspicion in his small, sharp, grey eyes. How did John junior manage to "finance" this year? But he asked no questions.

During the winter that followed he aged greatly: he felt very lonesome. More and more he pondered about the meaning of life. He felt useless.

Then, in the early spring of 1910 Fred Sately appeared once more on the stage. John junior had a tale to tell.

One day when John was in town Fred met him in the street and asked him to come to his office.

John went.

Fred was walking up and down. "Listen here," he said. "We are making another drive for shareholders."

"In that defunct company of yours?"

"Defunct? Farmers Limited is very much alive." But Fred's manner was less unctuous than formerly. As he glared at John, he was nervously biting the end of his moustache. "The whole concern was reorganised four years ago. There had been losses. We wrote them off. All shareholders paid in an additional forty dollars per share. The overhead was cut down."

"That means your salary?"

"Yes, my salary amongst others. I was the first to offer that. If the farmers were loyal, we could even now swing the proposed extension without new capital. The trouble is they don't know their own interest. They buy from us when they need credit. So long as they have money or can borrow, they send to the big mail-order houses. At any rate, we are going to place another fifty thousand dollars' worth of stock on the market. The mere fact that we survived the crisis of 1906 should prove to you that we are on a solid footing. But we need more capital. I do expect that this time my own relatives will stand behind me."

"As they stood behind you four years ago?"

Fred frowned loweringly. He was losing control over his temper. "How can you expect the ordinary farmer to support me when my own brother-in-law holds out?" he exclaimed.

"Fact is, I don't expect him to."

Fred was on the point of exploding. But, walking up and down, he fought with his anger till he could control himself again.

"Listen here, John," he said at last almost piteously. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I don't want your money. I want your name: the Elliot name. I'll put you down with five thousand dollars' worth of stock; you give me your note; I'll endorse it as paid. In other words, I'll make you a present of the stock."

John rose and rolled his prominent eyes up at him. "You mean to tell me that you give me five thousand dollars?" A peculiar smile played about his heavy lips.

"That's what it amounts to."

"Well," John said archly, the archness sitting grotesquely on his brick-red face, "I'll talk it over with Lillian."

The explanation of the effect which these words had on Fred Sately lay in the fact that, whatever John did against the wishes of others, was, in the family, attributed to Lillian's evil influence on him. Lillian was supposed to be, on principle, hostile to any suggestion not coming from her. John's answer, therefore, was tantamount to a refusal winged with the barbs of irony.

Fred was beside himself with fury. As a matter of fact, he had a number of promises "to come in" on this new issue of stock which were conditioned on his selling a block of shares to one of the Elliots. He knew that he could not approach the father with any proposition similar to the one he had made to John. But, with the optimism of the gambler, he had persuaded himself that John junior would not be "fool enough" to decline a gift. That John did so, shattered at one blow his last hope; for from an attempt to gain John Elliot senior's cooperation he did not promise himself a great deal. But, characteristically, driven into a corner by his financial necessities, he did not yield to despair but gave in to anger.

With a curse he veered on John. "To the devil with you! And with the whole family besides!" he exclaimed.

John's grinning face sobered. It would have been hard to tell whether he was play-acting or not. He seemed to tremble with sudden rage. He took a

threatening step forward and raised a clenched fist.

But Fred, realising his mistake and being a coward besides, sprang away before the blow fell and left the office through a side door which he drew shut behind him, turning the key in the lock.

A smile flitted over John's face. Then he laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and went out. In the general office, the single stenographer looked up with surprise as he strode through, whistling a popular air.

When John reached home, an hour or so later, he saw that Fred had preceded him. He was standing with his father in front of the barn.

John Elliot senior, strange to say, had hardly resented the trick which Fred had played him in the sale of his land. Somehow he had even come to look upon it with a certain respect. As his experiences in Manitoba receded in his memory and were replaced by what he saw of the Harveys, the Bramleys, and of his son's establishment, he had begun to look upon his offspring and upon the husbands of his daughters as a thriftless crew. They were not "making headway"; at best they were drifting along. Fred, of course, was preeminently what John Elliot despised: a trader. But he had weathered the storm four years ago; and John Elliot had taken that as a proof of ability. In fact, he had occasionally chuckled to himself when he thought of the way in which, after all, Fred had managed to make three thousand dollars out of that land deal.

One day, irritatedly, John junior had said to him, "I'll tell you, father. You've made good in your life

and all that. But you are unjust to us. Because we are not rich . . .”

“Rich!” John Elliot senior had interrupted him. “I don’t want my children and my sons-in-law to be rich. But I want them to show me to my satisfaction that they can make their daily bread.”

Apparently Fred could make that daily bread. Mary still lived in her sumptuous house.

But on this particular evening, when Fred had once more come walking over the hills, John Elliot’s suspicions were aroused, though he listened patiently to the other’s plea.

Fred chose a line of argument which differed greatly from that with which he had approached John junior. He proposed the purchase of the stock at a price of twenty dollars for a hundred-dollar share as a safe speculation. He expounded this thoroughly and wound up by saying, “A few years from now the stock will sell at par.”

John Elliot, standing very erect and quiet, by the side of his wagon in front of the barn, threw him a sharp look with which he seemed to read his whole mind. Fred was a little too anxious and emphatic.

“I am no speculator,” he said briefly and forbiddingly.

Fred pondered his next move. He was in desperate straits. Money he must have. He made up his mind to appeal once more to the father in this man. “Surely,” he said, “for Mary’s sake alone . . .”

“Don’t tell me what I owe my children,” John Elliot interrupted him. “I shall know what to do when the occasion arises.”

"You mean to say she must be ruined first!"

"So," John Elliot said, drawing in his breath sharply, "it is ruin which you are facing?"

Fred, unscrupulous as to his means and willing to lose the last trace of respect which his father-in-law might still have for him, provided he got the money, resolved to throw himself unconditionally on his mercy. "Yes," he said slowly, hanging his head and raising his hands in a sideways motion.

"Then," John Elliot replied as he turned away, "let ruin come!"

Next morning, between four and five o'clock, the whole establishment of Farmers Limited burned down to the ground. As far as could be ascertained, the fire started, with a high wind blowing, in the north-west corner of the compact of buildings: the office of the lumber yard. Next to it stood the warehouse filled with a goodly quantity of binder-twine. Then came the furniture store, with the general offices over it; and lastly, to the east, the implement sheds.

The whole was insured for twelve thousand dollars.

News of the fire reached the Elliot farms at noon of the following day. A settler passing along the road stopped and told John about it when he saw him at the well.

The fire had not been discovered till it had reached the central part of the compound which held the offices; for the high wind fanned the flames with enormous rapidity. It was a wonder, so the settler said, that "the whole blooming town" had not been destroyed.

John junior at once went over to his father's place.

The old man, on hearing the news, merely raised his eyebrows.

"I have half a mind," John junior said, "to go to town and see for myself."

To his surprise, his father nodded.

In town, John ran into Gladys. Frank also was there; and they had the children along.

John went about for an hour, looking on and listening to the street talk; then he went home, offering Gladys a seat in his cutter and promising to return with her to town, in time for Frank to reach his homestead before dark.

On the way neither spoke.

When they reached their father's gate, the old man, in sheep-skin and fur cap, came down to meet them.

Gladys did not stir from the cutter. "I just came to say good-day, father. Frank is waiting. John wants to return to town."

"Yea," John junior drawled, "about that fire . . ."

"He set it!" Gladys cried; but, amazed at the ease with which such an accusation had slipped from her lips, she bent forward, a scared expression on her face, and said no more.

John junior laughed. "Well-l-l," he said. "However . . . our friend Fred is walking about with the air of an undertaker. He's keeping everybody from touching as much as a charred spar. Says there will be trouble about the insurance if anything is touched."

John Elliot senior glared at vacancy. At last he asked, "Did you see Mary?"

"Not I!" Gladys said and shut her mouth on the words in a thin, straight line.

John said nothing.

"Howden won't commit himself," John went on after a while. "He's wired for the claim agent of the insurance company. They expect him tomorrow. Well, Frank's waiting. I guess I'll turn back."

John Elliot senior, nodding gloomily to his daughter, went to his house.

A day or so later John went to town again. His father had not suggested it; nor would he betray, when his son returned, that he had been lingering in the yard and waiting for him. When he went down to the gate, stiffly, as if he were walking on stilts, he tried to give this move of his a casual air by asking gruffly, "Well, no news yet, I suppose?"

"Yea," John said. "A little. Fred claims there was four thousand dollars cash in the safe."

The old man looked up sharply.

"The insurance people refuse to pay. Fred can sue, they say. They offer the exact amount of the premiums paid plus four percent."

"He does not take it, of course?"

"Oh no, not yet." John's intonation was hinting at all that he did not say. "Not just yet. He goes about talking big."

"You didn't hear by any chance," his father asked, "on what grounds they refuse to live up to the policy?"

"Yea, I did."

His father looked a question.

"Oh well, there may be some explanation, of course."

"For what?" his father asked impatiently.

John bent over and spoke confidentially. "For the fact—which, by the way, is established beyond cavil or doubt—that the safe in which the four thousand dollars were supposed to be was open—at four o'clock in the morning!"

John Elliot senior jerked his head, turned on his heels, and walked away across his yard.

John junior sat for several minutes without moving, leaning over to his left, his elbow resting on the side of the cutter. The expression of his face as he looked after his father, moving his eyes only, it would have been hard to define. Perhaps it was compounded of pity and triumph.

Next morning John Elliot senior hitched a horse to his own cutter; this was a low vehicle of wood, not as sumptuous as the steel cutter of his son's: the kind which in prairie parlance is called a jumper.

He had not slept; he was greatly worried.

He drove to town to see Mary, his daughter; he was going to make another attempt to induce her to leave her husband and to return with him to his house.

When he arrived in town, he found the Sately residence locked. Nobody responded to his knocks and calls.

At last, having tied his horse, he walked down to Mr. Howden's office.

"Do you happen to know where Mr. Sately is at the present moment?" he asked when he had been taken into the private room.

"No, I don't. Is he not at home?"

"No."

Mr. Howden looked blank.

"Is it true," John Elliot went on, without accepting the chair which Mr. Howden moved for him, "that the claim agent of the insurance company refused to do anything beyond refunding the premiums paid?"

Mr. Howden, his fleshy face falling into a mask of sympathy, almost whispered his answer. "It is. And what is more, Mr. Sately, after raving for a while and threatening a law-suit which he should have brought at once if he wished to silence the rumours that were afloat—Mr. Sately, last night, in this office, five minutes before the train left that was to take Mr. Knight, the agent, back to the city—Mr. Sately closed with the offer and took the money. I cashed the cheque for him."

"Good morning!" John Elliot said and went out.

On the way to his jumper, he muttered to himself, saying two, three times, "That is an admission! That is an admission!"

CHAPTER XI

JOHN ELLIOT PONDERES AND WRITES A LETTER

MORE still than before John Elliot lived by himself. More still than before those children of his who lived in the neighbourhood withdrew from him and went their own ways. They felt that he was growing old and indifferent to their fortunes. Thus years went by.

Yet he watched all the time; and perhaps he knew more about them than they thought. He was, for instance, aware of the fact that, economically, they were going downhill—"on the wrong side of the hill," as he expressed it.

The three younger farms: John's, old Mr. Harvey's, and Frank's, were all mortgaged. Kenneth's own place had not yet been "proved up"; he said he wanted to keep his homestead rights; in reality, he had not complied with the conditions. More and more grimly he talked of this "doggone dry country." John, too, seemed to be disgusted. Frank spoke of "circumstances beyond his control."

Isabel gave birth to a second pair of twins; John had another girl born to him; she received the incomprehensible name of Aurora.

John, Frank, and Kenneth began to see more of each other than they had done in the past. Perhaps one reason for that was that both John and Frank

ran a car. John bought gasoline by the tankful. Frank often came over now; and it nearly always happened that he ran out of motor-fuel when he reached John's place. Then he would ask for just a pint—enough to run back to town where he could "fill up."

"Sure," John would say with a magnificent gesture of his hand. "Go ahead. Help yourself. Fill her up, fill her up!"

And Frank did so, going to John's neat little garage where the gasoline tank stood on a scaffold of scantling.

Another reason was that Kenneth did more and more blacksmithing on the farm. His father had died at last—people said he had died of the fear of death; and Kenneth had taken a small portable forge and a great number of tools, besides, from the shop in town.

Both John and Frank found it a convenience to have their shares sharpened, their wagon tires sprung, their broken rods welded, their horses shod by him rather than by the new blacksmith at Sedgeby. He did better work; that he did it for nothing was rather a drawback; but then, he would not take pay.

The three women, however, did not for all that get nearer to each other.

During the first few years of the second decade of the century hard times came in earnest.

Henrietta left her husband for the second time and went to live with Gladys. Suddenly these two, Gladys and Henrietta, moved into town, into the former Sately residence, now owned by Mr. Howden. There they opened a boarding house.

John Elliot was so incensed that he never went near it. In fact, he avoided henceforth going to town. His little errands he had done by others, preferably strangers; in spite of the fact that John, having the car, would go to town two, three times a day throughout the open season. With the car, there is hardly any loss of time; if something is forgotten in the morning, you go again in the afternoon. It is pleasant to go to town; a pretext is easily found.

But John Elliot, seeing all this and interpreting it, would not even ask his son to bring his mail. In fact, when John did so without being asked, the old man grumbled; and John, henceforth, left off doing so.

The boarding-house enterprise in town, however, was short-lived. Less than six months after its inception it came to an inglorious end. Both Gladys and Henrietta returned to their husbands.

As for John Elliot, he thought this failure rather an aggravation of the offence; as if they had done it on purpose in order to spite him, in order to set the tongues wagging about the Elliots; as if there had not been enough already to talk about, without advertising the fact that the Elliot girls did not respect their marriage vows.

As for John, his father suspected that he had special reasons for going to town so often. All was not well between John and his wife.

John never spoke of it; he knew that his father would merely have said, "Your mother told you so."

On John's farm there were no chickens: he bought eggs from Isabel. "Poor girl!" he would say. "She needs the money!" There was only one cow; and

John milked her himself, summer and winter: that was a thing which Henry—who became more and more independent—refused to do. Altogether, Henry was no longer so useful as he had been; his father even knew that Lillian often urged John to let him look after his own. But a feeling of shame prevented John from yielding to that demand. For years Henry had done the work of a hired man on the place. Besides, he knew that his father, ever since that terrible thing had happened in the field, was afraid of the quiet boy in whom potential insanity lurked. John thought that he himself could handle him, now that he had had his warning.

But between him and Lillian things were coming to a bad pass.

Once, in threshing time, when John had hardly any crop—his wheat, planted late, of course, had been eaten by rust—John Elliot senior, happening to be on the road, talking to the boss of the threshing gang, overheard a short but acrid conversation between John and his wife who were standing in front of their shack.

Even the barley was poor; and Lillian hated threshing time—that time beloved by all who are rooted in the soil. She tried to persuade John not to thresh at all; there would be no money in it.

"There's no crop," she said. "At best it will only pay the threshing bill. Why should you load all that work on to me for nothing?"

"Well," John said indulgently, "so long as it pays the threshing bill! There will be barley!"

"Barley! What is barley!"

"That's just it," John replied. "Barley's barley. It feeds the horses!"

John Elliot senior had listened sharply. Yes, in that his son was right: barley feeds horses. It would be a sin to let it rot in the fields. Barley, it is true, had no price at the time; but for all that it fed as many horses as ever. On the farm, money values are irrelevant.

Yet, even for John times grew harder and harder. The reason was, of course, that credit exhausts itself. As the mettle of a settler becomes known, it adjusts itself automatically to his power of production.

It was at this time that the three younger men found most comfort in each other's company. It afforded relief to be able to curse the dry country and the short-grass district when things went wrong.

But, when it came to the test, it appeared that, in the eyes of outsiders, John had after all made more "headway" than any one else in the district except his father and Mr. Carroll. He owned more and better horses, a completer set of implements, less flimsy buildings than most; and that fact upheld a remnant of his old-time credit.

One day Frank dropped in and asked him to endorse a note. John felt flattered, that was the truth of it.

"Yes," the manager of the bank had said to Frank, "I'll let you have that four hundred if John Elliot senior or junior signs the note."

Ah-a! So his, John's, signature was "good," was it? He was the big farmer who owned three quarters and seeded between three and four hundred acres a year, crop or no crop.

Yes, certainly, he would endorse that note.
And he did.

Yet, the idea of leaving the district where "farming was a mere gamble"—thus the talk went now—looked more and more alluring to the three younger men; it was discussed to satiety. For even John began to feel swamped; he saw that things could not go on for ever.

The trouble was that, in order to be able to leave, you must be able to sell; and their very way of talking about the country in which they were settled helped to destroy the market for land in the district. Yet, strange to say, Neil Carroll was quietly making a success on Fred Sately's former place.

Strange to say, also, the first one to leave was Norman, thereby giving an initial impulse to the exodus of the family.

Up to 1913 Norman worked in the garage in town where he was now the expert mechanic. To hear him talk, he would never dream of doing any other work. By that time he was twenty-one years old.

Much later, when he himself had been greatly sobered by life, he told Cathleen and Gladys the story of how he came to leave Sedgeby and the Sedgeby district.

"Oh well, yes," he said, "I didn't think that anything was worth doing except to pull engines apart and set them up again. And I tell you, there is nothing about the ordinary run of motor cars that I don't know. I was making good money and wore forty-dollar suits and ten-dollar shirts on Sundays. The future, I thought, belonged to machinery.

"One day an old crank brought a miserable little flivver in for repairs. Oh, well," he added, laughing, "to tell the truth, it was a brand-new car; there was some trifle that had gone wrong. This fellow was a travelling salesman. Well, you know how greasy a fellow gets himself working about the crank-case. It had always been somewhat of a joke with us in that garage to smear a car all over with finger-marks. The farmers around there didn't mind; or they thought it couldn't be helped; and so they never said anything." Again he laughed. "I remember how, in this case, I took at last my oil-dripping hand and planted it on the front seat, leaving a big print of my fingers just where he would have to sit. We all laughed.

"Well, in comes Mr. Crank and looks his car over. And you should have seen him! He didn't laugh! He went off like a spit-fire, giving me a call-down the like of which I had never heard in my life. He wasn't going to pay for the job unless I cleaned that mess up.

"I told him to go to the devil. But in comes the boss and says curtly, 'The customer is always right, Elliot; you clean the car.'

"If it happened today, I'd see of course where he was right. But then? By jingo! I had quitted that job quicker than lightning. And what was more, I felt so disgusted that I swore I'd never have a boss again!"

As it happened, a United States American was in town, coming from California and going to the Faulknor district, about a hundred and twenty miles south-east of Sedgeby by the road, where he owned a number of farms.

This man, talking to Norman in the garage, had

taken a liking to the boy and, seeing him in the street, during the afternoon, when he was going to leave town, stopped his car and, after hearing his story, asked him how he would like to farm.

"Farm?" Norman said. "Might be all right."

"You've lived on the farm most of your life, haven't you?"

"Sure."

And, after a few minutes of negotiation, Norman had made up his mind to go along with this stranger.

It was a month or longer before any member of the family heard of it.

When the facts came to John Elliot senior's ears, he shook his head. Ordinarily he would have been pleased to hear that a son of his had left the town to go on the farm. But to do so without consulting him, the father—and, generally speaking, to make momentous changes on short notice and without proper deliberation, that was a thing beyond his comprehension. He came to see in this incident another proof of the fact that between the older and younger generations there lay an abyss. Besides, he felt deeply hurt by his son's neglect to take proper leave.

The look with which John Elliot peered out on the world which surrounded him was one of suspicion. Sometimes he went so far as to feel that among his children there was a conspiracy to drive home to him the little estimation in which he was held.

Margaret had for some time been the only one who wrote him short, business-like letters of news. A year ago she had completed her university course; and now she was teaching in a high school in Manitoba. Why

did she not come home, if only for her holidays? She went to Montreal instead, to attend a summer course in French.

There was a conspiracy! Or—were his children strangers to him? Did they forget him here on the prairie?

The truth of it was that those of the Sedgeby folk who corresponded with the Manitoba people—letters were scarce, fortunes proceeded along divergent lines, there was little in common—reported that John Elliot was aging and getting to be “queer.” In fact, he was sixty-two years old, white of hair and beard and gruff of speech. It seemed to occur to nobody that, perhaps, he needed looking after.

Often when he sat behind the house, in the evening, when the work was done, he would ponder. Behind the house, there was shade in the evening; though in front, too, and north of the yard, there stood long lines of poplar trees, planted by his wife. His wife! And lilac bushes . . .

He sat behind the house, rather than in front of it, because he did not want to be seen from the road!

There he sat and mused, often in an angry mood. Especially when, that fall, there was a great crop in the district and even John, in spite of shallow plowing and stubble-disking—to say nothing of late seeding—rolled, for a few months, in wealth! John had vowed that he would use the money coming in from the next “real” crop to give his wife and himself a holiday.

They went to the coast. Kenneth looked after his stock during his absence.

"What are we coming to!" John Elliot muttered as he sat behind his empty house. "Jumping all over the country like fleas!"

An uncontrollable feeling, as of approaching disasters, seemed to constrict his heart. He could not have told why.

Disasters were not long in coming; and yet, when they came, they seemed to go past John Elliot like a thunderstorm during the night. Only once in a while an exceptional crash awakens the sleeper. The damage done is not seen till morning.

The first of these disasters, the moving cause of several others, was the dry season of 1914. In the Sedgeby district, the drought lasted, unbroken, from the tenth of May till September fifteen. In many fields the moisture was insufficient even to germinate the seed; and this condition extended from considerably south of Sedgeby northward to the very banks of the South Saskatchewan River.

Then, in midsummer, the European war broke out, bringing with it world-wide restlessness, a tight money market, rising prices for all commodities, and a demand for increased production in every field. Within two years, this was followed, for the established farmer, by a fictitious prosperity.

The events which, as a more or less direct consequence of these two causes, broke over the Elliot family extended over five years. Yet, when the five years had gone by, it seemed to John Elliot senior as if things had happened blow after blow in unbroken succession.

The first of them consisted in the sudden break-down of Frank Bramley's edifice of credit: he had been "pyramiding" debts. This break-down worried John Elliot all the more as his daughter Gladys—though she came and told him about it—neither complained nor asked for help. She spoke of it as she would have spoken of a land-slide in which a mountain-side had buried her fields; or of a hailstorm which had destroyed all their hopes. She shed a tear or so; that was all.

The Bramleys were "sold out." There were two chief creditors: a mortgage company and the local bank.

"It is not Frank's fault," Gladys said in her wistful way, bending forward and holding her arms in her hands, in that attitude which had become habitual with her. She looked as if she could not laugh any longer. "Frank has worked and worked and done his work well. I know I used to be cross with him because he was slow. But that is his way; he can't help it. When things went wrong, he borrowed. He did not intend to cheat any one out of what was his. But it seems to me, they should have taken part of the risk. If we had had crops, we should have paid; and they would have made money out of us. We have no crops; but they will get theirs anyway. I don't think it is right. Of course, I did not know. Perhaps we might have saved a penny here and there. But when Frank had to tell me at last, I asked myself whether I could blame him or not. What was he to do? He could not pay and he cannot pay now. Let it go! Let it go!"

John Elliot cleared his throat. "How about those bank loans? What were they for?"

"To pay for the car, and an instalment on machinery."

"Well," John Elliot said as if in self-defence, "I have always warned and cautioned. You take credit, and you make yourself a slave to the man who loans you money."

"I don't know," Gladys said. "There is one thing I must say for Frank. We've always had our living and what was necessary in the line of clothing for myself and the children. And that is more than can be said for some people."

The last words were spoken with such an air of provocative mystery that, though he knew, John Elliot asked, "Whom are you thinking of?"

"I don't want to say anything. But the Harveys . . ."

"Isabel?"

"Ask her."

John Elliot stiffened. "The man . . ." he said and broke off. But, after a second's hesitation, he went on, "The man who lives on credit is no better than the man who starves. What are you going to do?"

Gladys shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"We'll live," she said. "Somehow we'll live. We are going to rent. Frank has an offer from Faulknor."

John Elliot rose. His long experience made further elucidations unnecessary. There had been a crop, and a good crop, in the Faulknor district. Norman had recently gone there. He would, of course, send glow-

ing reports. For one thing, like all young people, he would build conclusions on a slender basis of fact. It had rained at Faulknor when it had been dry at Sedgeby; therefore, Sedgeby was in the dry belt; Faulknor, in the belt of rains. And he who has exchanged one thing for another will never readily admit that he has made a mistake; he will justify his judgment by praising his choice. Those who were left behind, having recently suffered, are only too apt to believe that prosperity is at a distance.

"What is the use of talking?" John Elliot said to himself. "Their minds are made up."

A day or so later—he was plowing his wheat under: it was yellow and yet too short to be cut even with a mower—Kenneth passed on horseback, handsome, gay as ever.

John Elliot hailed him and said, "You might tell Isabel I want to see her."

"All right," Kenneth replied with his brilliant smile. He was afraid of his father-in-law and did not care to stop for further conversation.

Isabel came early one afternoon, when her four boys were sleeping.

John Elliot, seeing her descending the hill from the south, abandoned his horses and came to the road.

She climbed through the fence; and together they sat down on two stones. Isabel was plainly with child.

"I've sent for you," he said. "Do you have cause to complain? About your husband, I mean."

Isabel, taken by surprise and full of an indomitable

spirit hard to conquer—full also of the Elliot pride—denied it briefly, decliningly, almost offendedly. “Nonsense!” she said. “Who’s been putting that in your head?”

“Never mind. I wanted to know. Are you making headway?”

Slowly a furious blush suffused Isabel’s sun-baked face. “We’re all right,” she said curtly and rose.

“Just a moment.” John Elliot was obstinate. “You are sure there is nothing you would like me to do?”

“No.” Her voice was hard. “And if there were, I should not ask for it.”

John Elliot nodded and returned to his plow.

Isabel stood for a moment, tears in her eyes.

When he was riding his plow again, he saw her climbing back through the fence and then walking south, along the road, under the pitiless August sun which shone from a cloudless sky—that sky which, all through the summer, had remained the same, even after three days of parching, hot winds from the south.

That the war in Europe might ever affect him, had so far never entered John Elliot’s thought. But, towards the end of the month, Cathleen wrote a brief note saying that Arthur who was in his fourth year of study at the medical college had enlisted. “We shall miss his violin,” she added briefly.

Enlisted? What were we coming to? Meddling in the European war?

Somehow John Elliot felt at once that he was never

going to see this boy of his again. He hardly knew him: Arthur had left home when he was fourteen years old; he was twenty-one now.

Then, by a series of steps in the association of his ideas, he came to blame the boy: deliberately, after having dissociated himself from his home surroundings, he had kept away, choosing his sister's milieu in preference to his father's.

In September the municipality resolved to relieve distress in certain districts by road work. John junior, still a councillor and "road-boss" for his ward, insisted that the trail from his own place to town should be graded: the hill north of his and his father's place was to be cut down.

Scrapers made their appearance in the bottom between the two farms; surveyors went along the trail, driving stakes.

One morning eight teams appeared, and the work began.

One man, a grey-beard with a wooden leg, plowed up the soil on top of the hill. The huge drag-shovels were drawn by four horses each. Teamsters guided them, scraping up the loose earth on the hill top and throwing the shovels over in the bottom. At each end of the line of construction two men were stationed without teams; these held the long handles of the scrapers where the earth was scooped up, guiding the cutting edges into the ground; and below, where the material thus gathered was deposited again, the other two indicated the spot over which the teams were to go and tripped the shovels so as to empty them.

Kenneth Harvey was among the teamsters; but he came an hour or so late. John Elliot watched things from his yard.

The second day Kenneth came without his team. He "held scrapers."

John Elliot knew that the wages for a man with four horses was six dollars a day; for a man alone, two dollars.

At night, when the crew laid off and dispersed, he went down to the road to speak to his son who supervised the work.

"You know," he said, "that the Harveys are on the rocks?"

"Yea," John replied. He was now more than thirty years old. "I suppose so. Who isn't?"

"Well, I notice that you let Kenneth work without his team."

"Eh? He offered. Says he has no oats for his horses."

The old man looked up. He always looked indignant those days. "Oats?" he repeated in his angry, explosive way. "I've watched those teams. There isn't one that gets any oats."

"Oh yes," John drawled. "There's one. Carroll's team. The rest don't. I told Ken. What can you do? He prefers to hold scrapers. When he brings a team, he's got to catch his horses early in the morning."

"You mean to say he's too lazy?"

John junior laughed. "Lazy's a hard word to use. But bed feels good in the morning. He finds it hard to get here in any case."

The Bramleys moved before the freeze-up. Gladys came over to say good-by.

"You know, of course," she said casually, "that Norman's married?"

John Elliot's quick, sharp look betrayed that he did not know. But the moment he understood the full significance of what Gladys had said, he shrugged his shoulders and raised his hands—a gesture which might mean anything. He did not, in so many words, acknowledge that the news was a complete surprise to him.

Coolly, suspiciously, he lifted his cheek for her to kiss.

He had tried to show an interest in his children: what did he live for except for them? He had tried to refocus their outlook on himself, on the parental home. He had failed.

Thus, when the Harveys pulled up their stakes, he did not, outwardly, show much interest. John junior had dropped a remark.

"They've been living off the old lady. But the old lady has nothing left. He's moving into town, to Faulknor, to try blacksmithing for a change. I don't know but what it's a wise thing to do. If I had any crop, I believe I'd pull out myself. But, you see how things are with me."

Isabel came to say good-by; and Kenneth stopped to shake hands when John drove them to town. They took nothing but their personal belongings. Their few household goods had been sold to cover the moving expenses.

Shortly after, when snow had fallen, John Elliot senior took the last quarter of the previous year's crop to town, some eight hundred bushels of wheat.

A feeling of dread, of insecurity, made him carefully canvass his needs. He bought only what seemed to be indispensable for a year's living and banked the remainder of his money.

That winter news reached him from the Satelys. It came, as usual, through John.

"Yea," John said. "Didn't you know? Fred's in B. C."

"Fruit farm?"

"Suppose so. With a bit of work in a lumber camp thrown in. I've heard a saw-mill mentioned."

The old man put two and two together. He knew his son John's ways. What he had said amounted to this, interpreted into ordinary English: that Fred Sately had come to be a labourer on day wages. If at least Mary would write! But Mary, too, was proud like the rest.

The very way in which the news had reached him, news though it was, accentuated the utter isolation in which he was left.

Then, beginning with 1916, came the "boom"—the fictitious prosperity of western Canada in which many a prudent man lost his head.

No wonder, then, that John lost his.

Wheat sold at two dollars a bushel; finally, just before the government fixed its price, it rose to three.

In the fall of 1917 John junior made a trip to Manitoba. When he left Sedgeby, he was depressed

and discouraged; he was at the end of his tether and knew it. When he returned once more, he was a different man.

From the few words which were exchanged between him and his father, John Elliot senior gathered that he had bought land, a half section, for eighteen thousand dollars, on credit. Anybody who promised to raise crops in Manitoba had credit.

"It's flax land," John said. "Flax sells at six dollars."

John Elliot senior was tempted to raise his hands in despair. But he controlled himself. "Buildings on the place?"

"Not a thing."

"What are you going to do?"

"Run them up as fast as I can."

His father stared at him. "You'll never pay for the place," he said angrily. "You can sell to advantage in a boom. To buy is ruin. This war won't last for ever."

John junior shrugged his shoulders impatiently. For the first and only time he betrayed just how angry he was with his father. "It's my chance," he said. "It's done anyway. What's the use of discouraging me? I'm a grown man. I owe nobody any explanations. Besides, what's the use?" And he turned his back.

Just before, in 1918, John moved, news came, officially, of the death in action of Arthur. It affected his father strongly. Not that he mourned greatly; he had hardly known the boy; but the first of his

children had died! How long did he himself have to live?

John Elliot senior became a miser. Old age was approaching. His children had left him one and all. He was not going to go to the poor-house!

The higher prices soared, the less he bought. Money piled up in the bank. By the time the war was over, he could have drawn a cheque for fifty thousand dollars, and it would have been honoured.

Repeatedly he had invested small sums in war-loans. Now the price of these bonds declined; and as if he had been waiting for that moment, he "plunged." He invested all he had, determined to hold on.

He had always been fond of good coffee. The kind he liked best rose to eighty cents a pound. He bought green beans at twenty-two cents and roasted them himself in a frying pan. Sugar sold at twelve, fourteen dollars; and finally at twenty, twenty-two, twenty-six, twenty-eight. He had, with old age, come to be almost excessively fond of sweets; but he ceased using sugar. Bread? Who should bake bread for him now? He lived on oatmeal.

His income from the farm was ten times what he needed. His income from his investments exceeded three thousand dollars a year. He hoarded it all.

At last he ceased, in summer, to use any fuel except the coal-oil for his lamp. He invented a wire device fastened to its chimney so that he could boil a little water in a tin pan over the flame of that lamp.

In winter, he moved his bed into the kitchen, the former dining room of his house; and, since the cellar

froze up, he piled bags filled with potatoes and other provisions in the south end of the room, blocking the huge bay window. When, one day, a pane broke, he pasted black tar paper over it, inside and outside, instead of replacing the glass.

Concurrently with this development, his inner life began to be dominated by a secret and powerful longing, especially after John had left.

John's farm had been bought by a clerk in town. It was rented to a stranger who moved in at once. John Elliot did not even know his name and never enquired.

The longing which became poignant—so poignant that it affected him like acute home-sickness—was indefinite at first. But slowly it took shape in the form of a desire to see once more a happy household as his own had been a quarter of a century ago.

Sometimes, during the winter of 1918 to 1919, he sat in his huge, chilly room, the only one now used in the great house, with overshoes on his feet and a muffler wrapped around his throat, tied under the white and untrimmed beard, and stared into vacancy with unseeing eyes which began to grow blar. His eyes were unseeing; and yet he seemed to see things: the children at play after dark, in this very dining room, by the light of the lamp, with Gladys knitting perhaps, she being the oldest, and with his wife sitting by, her hands in her lap, and looking on over the rim of her glasses.

He would smile as he saw that vision.

But, when he suddenly realised with a start that he

was sitting alone, in that chilly room of the house between the hills, with not one of his children left in the district, anguish would seize him with invisible hands by the throat; and he would get to his feet and walk about as in a cage in order to conquer that feeling of loneliness, going up to the pile of bags at the south end of the room, and back to the door at its north end—that door over which, to keep out the draught, he had hung a horse blanket from the barn.

Once in a while he received a letter: from Cathleen, Gladys, or Isabel. For several days he carried it about in his pocket without opening it. He would hold it in his hands and enjoy its touch—as he might have held the hand from which it came. When at last he read it, it seemed cold and impersonal. It did not tell him what he wished to know: how they fared and that they loved him. A stranger seemed to speak from its pages; not the child, his child whom he would have liked to hear.

But insensibly, as this great longing grew upon him, the feeling which had tormented him during the last twelve years departed: the feeling that his life had reverted to chaos. Once more there seemed to be some purpose in life, some aim. That aim was to assemble his children about him one day, to see them all together again; to feel once more that this was his family, his seed “to multiply as the stars in heaven.”

Thus, by slow degrees, spring came; and again he seeded his land.

He was sixty-eight years old. Most of his horses were old, too. He did what he could; and he hardly

noticed that there were things which he could no longer do. He rose at four o'clock in the morning and fed the horses. He milked a cow and scattered grain for the chickens, the few which he still kept. Then he had breakfast; and next he harnessed the horses. His trouble, these days, was that he found the harness strangely heavy. It took him a long while to finish that task; and he knew it. Yet he did it without ever thinking of getting outside help. His children were gone!

As he sat on the seeder, he had sometimes strange lapses of memory. It seemed to him that, as he had had ten children, ten such seeders as his were being drawn over the prairie, so that, through his children, he had multiplied the land reclaimed from the wilderness by ten. He forgot that not all of them were farming; he forgot that not even all of them were alive.

From the road, the few people that passed saw only an old, white-bearded man who scolded morosely at his horses and jerked his lines over their backs. They little thought that he was harbouring dreams and visions full of spring-like rays of light and warmth.

And, after all, these were moments only, alternating with peculiarly painful visions of the reality.

Summer came. The days ran smoothly.

Then, one afternoon, shortly after dinner, while he was working on the summerfallow near the road, a car topped the hill from the north, coming over the new grade. There were many cars in the country now. People thought that they could no longer live

without them. "The prosperity of the country is conditioned on transportation!"

But this car looked different from other cars. It was a big and powerful machine, travel-stained.

It stopped in the hollow.

A lady bent out from the seat, scanning the hillside. She pointed; and the car moved on.

Again it came to a stop, right in front of the line which John Elliot was trying to hold with his cultivator.

Three people alighted: a man, a woman, a child. John Elliot hurried his horses along. Were they strangers, wishing to enquire about the road? No. All three were climbing through the fence.

The child and the lady began to run a race, laughing.

He stopped his team and waited.

"I beat! I beat!" the child cried. "Grandpa, didn't I beat?"

The next moment Cathleen stood by his side; just as he climbed down from his seat. "Father!" she exclaimed and bent down to kiss him.

He was bewildered. A middle-aged man was shaking his hand.

"Still doing God's work? We've been wanting to run up, year after year. But you know, the war!"

"Well," John Elliot said, coughing and hemming and hawing in order to disguise his emotion, "I'll unhitch. Let's go to the house."

Woodrow Ormond bent down to unhook the traces.

"Yes," Cathleen said—she was a woman of thirty-five, tall, somewhat fleshy, distinguished in her dark clothes, almost stately, "we made the trip at last. We

dropped in on John and on Hennie; and now we are stopping with the rest at Faulknor. You know, they live all close together. Norman and Gladys are two miles apart; and Gladys and Isabel one. Yes, we've been there for a week and intend to stay a little longer. Margaret is expected on Monday."

They reached the yard—Ormond had returned to the car and driven it back, arriving before them. The child, in a light zephyr dress, skipped ahead to the barn.

"Well," the old man asked when he had put his horses in, "how long are you going to stay?"

"Till tomorrow," Cathleen said. "We have tent and cots along. We won't be any trouble."

John Elliot coughed. "Trouble!" he said. "Well, stay till Monday anyway. It isn't so far."

"A little over a hundred miles by the road. No, it isn't far."

At the house, Cathleen felt almost terrified by the state in which she found things. She went to work at once, cleaning up and getting order into the establishment.

She prepared an elaborate supper, sending Woodrow to town for materials. She knew that her father was fond of pies, cake, and "cookies"; and there was no sugar in the house and but little flour.

When her father looked in, she tried to remonstrate with him, telling him that it was unhealthy to store potatoes in a room used for sleeping.

But he grew testy at once and answered in a peevish, irritated tone, as if he resented her suggestions as meddling.

When he had left the house, she went upstairs and found the upper story in complete decay. Nearly all window panes were broken; everything was covered with dust, inch-thick; and, worst of all, the whole had become a veritable sanctuary for birds that nested in the walls and in the mattresses of the beds.

She gathered her skirts about her and walked on tiptoe; and at last, with a despairing shrug, left everything as she had found it and slipped down again.

But her father had entered the house and knew where she had been. He was in one of his darkest moods and took all she did as a criticism and a reflection. He walked about with his short, angry, staccato steps which sounded as if he were walking on wooden stumps. After a while, when she was engaged about the stove, she heard hammering in the narrow front hall; and when she went out to empty a pail of water, she saw that he had nailed the door to the stairway up.

Woodrow and the little girl Martha had gone for a walk over the hills. When they returned, they pitched the tent, on a level spot north of the house. John Elliot passed the place repeatedly; but he did not stop and betrayed no interest in their doings.

Not before supper did he relent. But, after having wrathfully glared at the table, loaded with pies, cake, and fresh bread, he applied himself to the task of appeasing his appetite with a gusto which showed that he enjoyed the meal.

Cathleen was careful not to say any more about his arrangements; and matters ran smoothly enough.

In the evening, all four of them sat in the shade

of the trees along the road where Cathleen and her little girl had placed four chairs. She did not know, of course, that for many years her father had sat nowhere except behind the house.

John Elliot expanded and began to ask questions about things that were near his heart. How was John? Would he make a success?

"Well," Woodrow said, inclining his square, greying head doubtfully, "that is hard to say. I don't think that, even under the most favourable circumstances it would be easy to pay out of crops for a place that costs close to sixty dollars an acre. Especially not with extensive farming."

"No. No."

"The interest charges alone seem prohibitive, at eight percent. There is a debt of eighteen thousand dollars on the land. And besides, John owes four or five thousand on the lumber. This year's crop was seeded late. There was water on the fields in spring. And I don't see how that could be different in any year. He gets the floods from the hills."

"Eh?" John Elliot asked. "What district is he in? I haven't a map."

"West of Arkwright."

John Elliot raised a withered hand and clucked his tongue.

"Of course, he has two hundred acres of flax in; and if the price holds . . ."

"It won't."

"Well," Woodrow agreed, "I don't think so, either. Flax at five or six dollars! Yet, if he gets three!"

"Flax," John Elliot said; and his voice sounded like

a blaring trumpet, "will sell at less than two dollars this fall!"

"If it does, there is no chance."

John Elliot, to outward appearances, seemed to feel almost gleeful at this verdict. "How about Pete?"

Woodrow raised his head. "Now there is a man, a hard worker, a careful planner, and yet—he does not seem to be making headway either!"

John Elliot shot a quick glance at him and then at his daughter.

"Everybody," Cathleen said as if to avert something, "seems to be down on poor Hennie."

"Three hundred dollars at eight percent compound interest amounts to more than twice that in ten years. And you know, of course, that Pete has been down again with pneumonia?"

"The Faulknor people?" the old man asked quickly, anxious to get away from the subject of Pete.

"Renting!"

"Ah!" John Elliot exploded, lugubriously shaking his head. "No good! No good!"

"What I tell them. But . . ."

"Young people," John Elliot said angrily, "won't listen these days. We used to do as our fathers did before us. We profited from their experience. But today! All lessons are lost on them. No use talking! World's gone crazy! . . . What kind of a woman has Norman married?"

"Well," Cathleen said quickly, "I don't think it is right to condemn her at once. She is not yet nineteen."

Again John Elliot shook his head. Yet it was easy

to see that even to speak of his children cheered him up.

Next day—it was Sunday—the morning was taken up with packing. Cathleen and Woodrow did not think after all that they could stay till Monday. Woodrow expected important mail at Faulknor, and they had promised to meet the train in which Margaret was expected to arrive from the east. Soon after, they meant to go farther west.

John Elliot, wrapt in himself, attended to his chores about the barn.

The Ormonds stayed till after dinner. At parting, tears stood in Cathleen's eyes; she divined what things meant to her father.

John Elliot raised his cheek to be kissed; but he wore a grim expression on his wrinkled, bearded face. His daughter could see how much he resented it that they left him so soon; yet he would not stoop to ask them once more to stay over.

"We'll come more frequently after this," Cathleen said. "It is really nothing since we have the car."

She sat in the front seat with Woodrow. The baggage was carried on the left running board. Martha, the little girl, was the only one in the roomy tonneau at the back.

He nodded. Hands were waved. And the car climbed the hill.

For a long while John Elliot stood by the fence. Behind his back, the house which had once held a large family seemed spectrally empty. Loneliness had re-descended upon the hills like a pall.

At last he turned and went to the barn, walking with his short, angry-looking steps. He went through its whole length and came out again. Once more he looked up at the hills all about. It was as if something held his throat in a vise. Curious, abrupt little sounds escaped from his lips. He was unconscious of them.

The day went by.

On Monday he returned to his work. But somehow all things seemed changed. He detected himself in the act of speaking: he was addressing one or the other of his children; and, strange to say, more frequently than to any other he was speaking to Gladys. He began to realise that, more than any other, she was like him; oldest daughters mostly resemble their fathers.

He pondered every word which Woodrow had said.

Of Kenneth, "You can't make anything whatever a success, least of all on the farm, when you don't get to work till ten in the morning." For Kenneth, after having made a failure of the blacksmith business in town, had returned to a farm.

Of Norman and his wife, "I'll tell you. When those two people face hunger—and, no matter how much money may come their way, they will one day—then the battle royal of their lives will be lost or won. Economically, there is no help for them. Suppose somebody made them a present of their farm, in a few years they would be back where they are. Instead of the owner, they would have the holder of the mortgage to deal with, that is all."

Of Frank, "He has no moral consciousness. He takes the money where he can get it."

All these were harsh judgments, perhaps; but they suggested a world that was life—and the life, after all, of his children, his flesh and blood.

He should be among them, advise them, whether his advice was heeded or not.

And then, as the week went by, other things rose in his mind.

One night, many years ago, all those who were still at home had gathered in that large dining room of the house and sung hymns. He seemed to hear the crystal chorus of their voices. "Nearer, my God, to thee."

And such a longing burst in upon him that he sat on his plow while the tears ran down his snow-white beard.

If only they had remained children! If only he still were their father from whom they expected all good and all evil!

At last, on the following Sunday, the longing simply to be with them—whether they did as he wanted them to do or not—became so great, so over-powering that he found a pad of letter paper, cleared a corner of his table—it was littered again as it had been before Cathleen came—and sat down to write to Woodrow.

"My dear son," he wrote, "and children all. Last Sunday when you left I saw the large back seat of your car almost empty. I did not think of it, then. There are, at present, on those farms at Faulknor, five of my remaining nine children assembled. If I count my sons and daughters-in-law and my grandchildren, there are seventeen out of thirty-four. I

should like to be with you and them for a while. I can arrange to have my stock looked after. My fields can wait for a week or two. You have the car, my son. Would it be too much trouble if I asked you to run over once more and to get me?

"With the best wishes for you all, I remain,

"Your loving father."

When he had written this letter, in his fine but trembling hand, he went to the barn and hitched one of the plow horses to the buggy, for Dolly and Prince, his old drivers, had died long ago.

He drove to town and posted the letter.

On his way back, he carefully calculated when, at the earliest, he could expect the response. Not before Wednesday! Three long days to wait!

Now that letter reached Faulknor exactly at the calculated time, on Tuesday night. Nor was it delayed at the post office; for Woodrow ran his car down daily at train time to fetch his mail. So far he had been attending to certain matters of business which were forwarded to him from his house in the city. But on the very day before he had received the last parcel of any importance. He and Cathleen had made up their minds to make use of the respite his work afforded and to leave on the following morning for a short trip to the mountains and the coast; Margaret was to accompany them.

Yet when, sitting in front of the little post office in his car, right in the centre of the small town of Faulknor, Woodrow read his father-in-law's letter,

he felt very doubtful whether to carry out the projected program or not. His first impulse was to do as the old man wished.

As it happened, all the members of the Elliot family that lived within call were assembled at Isabel's place; it was a leave-taking gathering. So, without making any decision, he started his car, turned in the street, and ran out into the open country.

The road ran north, uphill and downhill, uphill and downhill again.

After half an hour's swift driving the car shot up a last steep hill on the top of which stood a small shack, close to the road-side—low and flimsy, covered with black tar paper all around. Behind it, a tent of brown sail silk was pitched; and, still farther back, a ram-shackle, tumble-down barn looked as if it were flung away on the prairie.

As he stopped his machine, in front of the shack, Cathleen, Margaret, Isabel, Gladys, and Norman stepped out of the open door.

Cathleen and Margaret resembled each other, a resemblance still further emphasized by the fact that both wore light but fashionable city clothes.

Isabel was of stronger, almost masculine build; her feet were encased in torn, white running shoes with rubber soles; her dress, of gingham, hung unevenly about her stout legs; her face, ruddy, sun-burned, was framed by her short-cut hair which fell about it in almost disorderly masses.

Gladys, small, delicate, and dispirited-looking, was clad in a simple but neat and tidy house-dress. Her sharp face never bore a smile any longer.

Norman stood in striking contrast to her. He was a noisy, conceited young man of twenty-eight who wore an expensive silk shirt and a pair of blue-serge trousers which were sharply creased and much too short, for such was the fashion of the day. His round, merry face knew not of care.

"Well," Cathleen asked, "any mail?"

Woodrow reached into his pocket. "A single letter of any importance. It is to us all."

"From whom?" Margaret asked. She and Cathleen had linked arms.

"From your father."

"No!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Your father writes—the letter was addressed to myself . . ." And he read it to them.

When he finished, he looked from one to the other.

A silence had fallen. A curious, closed expression had appeared on all faces. Nobody cared to say the first word.

"As for myself," Woodrow went on, "I am willing to let our trip go."

The silence lengthened. Everybody seemed to be immersed in thought. Again Woodrow looked from one to the other.

At last Gladys fixed her eyes on Isabel.

Isabel laughed an embarrassed laugh. "Well," she asked her oldest sister, "what do you say?"

"What do you say?" Gladys countered. Then, with her mouth closed in a very straight, thin line and her forehead puckered into a frown, she nodded. "I, for my part," she said at last, "say no!"

Isabel became serious. "Well, I don't see . . ."

"No!" Gladys repeated almost fiercely. "Look how we live. My house is a mere windbreak. Where should we put him? You have no room!"

"I?" Isabel asked. "I can't offer him a bunk. Bunks is all we've got."

Woodrow looked at Norman. "You have the room," he said. "At the worst we should have to buy a bedstead and a few blankets."

"Not I!" Norman said lightly. "No. What would he do? He'd walk about restlessly and criticise everything. You know the old man. And he wouldn't stay more than a day before he'd want to get back home. Look at how he did with Cathleen and Hennie some ten years ago. No, sir! Not I!"

"Still," Woodrow persisted, "he's your father. An old man. Seventy years of age!"

"How old *is* father?" Cathleen asked as if she wished to create a diversion in the general deadlock.

"He is sixty-nine," Gladys said. "I am sorry for him. But I can't have him. It can-not-be-done! If I had a house that were halfway decent! As it is, no!"

Woodrow climbed out of the car. "Well," he said, "folks, this is your banquet, not mine. I am a guest here myself. It was good enough for me."

"No!" Gladys repeated once more. "To tell you the truth, I should never have dreamt of inviting you people either. You did not ask. You simply came. And you brought your tent and your own beds. Now you've seen how we live. But father? No! You must write to him."

But this time Woodrow had a decided "No!" to utter. "Listen here, Gladys. I will be quite frank

with you. I don't approve of this. I can understand how you feel. But you are his children; and if he scolds, you should take it in good part. But as I said, I am not the host here. If your father is not to come, you will have to write him the reason yourself!"

The group broke up. Norman, Isabel, and Gladys went into the shack where boys and girls were playing about in a noisy manner.

Woodrow went to his tent; and Cathleen and Margaret followed him, arm in arm.

When, about noon of the next day, Woodrow's car with its four passengers passed between Sedgeby and John Elliot's farm, Cathleen said to her husband, "I pity father!"

Woodrow waved his arm in a significant gesture meant to express what he felt. "Lear of the prairie!" he said.

And, for a moment, a hand of steel seemed to close about Cathleen's heart.

From the first convenient place in the mountains, in the town of Banff, Cathleen addressed a picture post-card to John Elliot of Sedgeby, writing on it nothing but the four names of those in the party.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, John Elliot senior had spent the morning in great agitation. He had not gone to work. Instead, he had, very early, crossed over to John's former place and made arrangements with its tenant for the feeding of his stock. Then he had dressed in his "Sunday best"—the black suit which he

had bought decades ago and which began to look greenish on shoulders and back.

As the morning wore on, his excitement had steadily increased. At noon he went up the hill behind his house. From there he could see the whole north road and part of the east-west road south of town. That was the Trans-Canada Highway along which they must come.

Many cars travelled along that road, as in summer they do day after day; and among them was the very car for which he waited. But not a single one turned south at the corner.

He stood there till three o'clock without having taken any dinner.

"He didn't get it in time," he muttered at last. "He won't come today."

And he went down to the house, for the first time showing the reeling gait of hoary old age.

Next day, the same thing was repeated; and again on the day that followed.

On Friday night he hitched up and went to town to ask for his mail. There was none.

Henceforth, for a week, he went to town daily. And yet no letter arrived.

But he did not return to his work, in spite of the fact that in the summerfallow weeds began to peep through the soil.

Then, on Saturday night of the second week, he received Cathleen's postcard. For a while he merely stared at it, uncomprehendingly.

Only when he sat in his buggy again, going home, did he understand that two out of the five of his chil-

dren who had been assembled at Faulknor had left.

His letter must have missed them. Perhaps it would reach them some day. They would come.

Next morning, at dawn, he rose and fed his horses; and after breakfast he placed the harness on their backs. By seven o'clock he was in the field, on the summerfallow whence two weeks ago he had seen the car.

He did not even notice that he was working on Sunday.

BOOK THREE
IN EXILE

CHAPTER XII

JOHN ELLIOT VISITS FAULKNOR

AGAIN a few years had passed by.

John Elliot had never been very strong; but neither had he ever known illness. Yet, with increasing age, little infirmities made themselves felt; and other signs of the decay of the human faculties supervened—lapses of memory, unexpected naps, a slight deafness, a dimming of his eye-sight; his teeth loosened in his mouth; his temper grew beyond control.

The last of his family who had seen him were the Ormonds. Repeatedly they had made an attempt to rouse the rest of his children to a realisation of his plight. Repeatedly also they had offered him a refuge in their house.

Unexpectedly, one winter, having arranged with his neighbours across the road to look after his stock, he started for British Columbia: Mary had dropped him a line telling him about herself and giving her exact address.

He found her near Edgewood on Lower Arrow Lake, in the Columbia valley. She lived in a small but comfortable house, a woman of forty-five, strangely refined for her rugged surroundings. She was quite alone.

Her two girls, of twenty-four and twenty-three years respectively, were married; the male members

of her family were away, working in a lumber camp. There, her husband, now a man of over sixty, held the position of a foreman; her two oldest sons, of twenty-six and twenty-five years, both married, were with him; and so were her two youngest children, unmarried boys at the threshold of their twenties.

When, on the evening after his arrival, he sat opposite his daughter and scanned her face by the light of the lamp, he seemed to see a stranger; she was taller than he, massive and quiet: of all the girls, she was the only one who had grown into an almost exact replica of her mother as she had been at her age, four years before her death. But her features were sharper than Mrs. Elliot's had ever been; as if they had been drawn with a more pointed pencil. Mrs. Elliot's quiet majesty—which had remained undisturbed till she was within six or seven months of her death—was, in her daughter, marred by a slight, irritable imperiousness which was not, as in Henrietta, temperamental, but developed by the vicissitudes of life. She had learned that she must rule or be ruled; and she had come to do the former. As for her husband, once a great man for her, she had ceased to admire him as soon as the last failure of his scheming enterprise had forced him to live in constant and immediate proximity to her. For fifteen years now he had done as she had bidden. She handled the money; and she had made up her mind that she, at least, was neither going to live in want in her old age nor be a burden to her children.

She and her father were strangers. The very politeness and consideration with which she treated him

drove that fact home. In her presence he felt helpless like a child. When she said something with which he did not agree, he drew his head down between his shoulders, with a peculiar gesture as if he were going to let the storm pass by. Thus when she spoke scathingly of education. Education in Ormond's sense, as a widening of human horizons and sympathies—which, according to him, could be arrived at more expeditiously by the hard knocks of life than by formal schooling—was quite unknown to her. The only kind she knew was her husband's kind; he had been a reader of all sorts of magazines professing to be serious publications, dealing with business, the principles of success, and similar things; and he had ended as a fugitive from justice. If no prosecution had ever been instituted, the reason was that people preferred to let him go. When he was at home, in summer, he still sometimes spoke regretfully of the past; as if he would like to start it all over, avoiding, of course, the mistakes he had made.

"No," Mary said, with a grim sort of smile, when she told her father about it, "I won't listen to any such thing. I know, of course, that my children were born with the taint. So, during the last fifteen years, I have raised them as labourers who know no other life but the one they are leading. I have never allowed books and magazines in the house. Thank God, they are strong and healthy; and I encourage them to marry young, so that they will come to know serious responsibilities at an early age; that will anchor them.—So far it has never seemed strange to me that I am a grandmother now. It does seem strange

at this moment when I see you sitting there and reflect that you are my father."

The day went by; and other days followed, full of a strange, melancholy sweetness; in retrospection, later on, they seemed to partake of the quality of hours spent in a shelter found by chance on an alien shore while hail is drumming down on the roof overhead.

John Elliot stayed for a week and then went home.

That single week, however, had wrought a great change in him. He found it almost impossible to resume the routine which he had broken. He began to play with the idea of moving to town and of renting the farm.

So, when, shortly after his return, another letter arrived from the Ormonds, inviting him to come and to spend a few weeks with them in the city, and then perhaps to move on, to go from place to place, and to visit all his children, he coughed with a strange emotion. As he sat in his grey, chilly room, within the grey house between the hills, he read that letter over and over. There was no denying it; he was getting old.

His favourite dream: that of having all his children living about him, the Elliots of Sedgeby, had failed of fulfilment. He was now more than threescore and ten. His body had become dry and hollow with years. The solitude scared him.

Perhaps it was best to give in, to acknowledge what was past denial; not to wait any longer for them to return; to go out and to accept the hospitality offered.

He did not need to be a charge on them; he could pay his way.

One day, late in winter, he went to town to see Mr. Howden.

Mr. Howden, too, was no longer the young and forceful man he had been. He did not come out, smiling and bowing when John Elliot entered. Heavily he sat behind his desk in the private office and called to him to come in when he recognised his voice—pleasantly, to be sure, but a little wearily also.

John Elliot entered and sat down.

"Still up and doing, Mr. Elliot?" the other man asked. "It's pretty hard to beat the old stock."

John Elliot coughed and hemmed. Then he broached the subject; he had never been a man of many words.

"Well, yes," Mr. Howden said. "So you are going to leave the farm, are you? Too bad that one of your children doesn't move on to it. However . . ."

And they discussed terms and conditions. One of the conditions was that the house should not be used. If the prospective tenant needed a house, John Elliot was willing to build a shack of two, three rooms. The house was to be locked up and reserved for him.

"By the way," Mr. Howden said when the interview was ended. "Frank Bramley, your son-in-law, was in town the other day."

John Elliot looked up as if he were shocked.

"I know," Mr. Howden nodded. "He did not go out to your place. He did not have time. He was looking at some machinery, second-hand stuff, which

he wished to buy. I don't know." He seemed to hesitate.

"Eh?"

"Might just as well tell you, I suppose. There is going to be trouble for Mr. Bramley. In payment for the machinery which he bought, he issued a cheque on a bank where he has no account."

John Elliot had already risen. He sat down again. "What's that?" he coughed.

Mr. Howden, with a look of compassion, repeated what he had said. "I have the cheque here," he added and flicked a paper across to the old man. "The payee happened to come in and asked me to cash it."

John Elliot fingered the paper for some time. Then he blew his nose and wiped his straggling beard. "You make out another cheque for the amount," he said at last. "I'll sign it." He was thinking of Gladys.

"Very well," Mr. Howden said. "Bad business, that."

John Elliot carefully folded the little slip of paper and, unbuttoning his sheep-skin coat, put it away in the pocket of his vest.

Two weeks later, one day, Mr. Carroll called at the farm in the hollow between the hills.

"I hear you want to rent your place," he said to John Elliot, smiling his broad smile which uncovered gold-filled teeth.

"Yes," John Elliot replied. "I was thinking of it. Howden has the renting."

"So I understand. I'd like to have a look at the stock. I have a boy, you know. He was eighteen last

December. I was thinking of taking the place for him."

Before he left, the thing was arranged.

But still John Elliot stayed. He was rid of the work now; yet it seemed hard to leave the place where he had lived and worked for over fifty years.

At last he was ready.

One day, in March, Gus Carroll, his young tenant, drove him to town.

When he boarded the train, he had taken a ticket to Regina. There he would stop and decide what to do. Perhaps he would simply stay in town.

But when he alighted at the provincial capital, it was ten o'clock at night. He carried his heavy suitcase and felt himself jostled and pushed about in the crowd. A baggage truck nearly knocked him over; and when, with an indignant look, he stepped aside, the trundler laughed and called out to him, "Step lively there, whiskers!"

He felt deserted and left alone.

At last he went to a small hotel near the station to think matters over. He procured a time table and entered his room. Already he felt sorry that he had left Sedgeby and the security of his house; nobody knew him here; he was just a silly old man. Down there, in the street, motor cars honked and street cars thundered by.

How if he sent a telegram to the Ormonds?

No. A sort of obstinacy invaded him. He would find his way alone.

He sat down on the bed whose covers filled him with distrust.

"No," he said to himself. "No. I am going to go to Faulknor. I want to see for myself."

He lay down without undressing and spent the night, now lying awake, now dozing in fitful snatches of sleep.

Next morning, he took the local train southwest to Faulknor. It was an all-day trip, and night had come before he stepped off the train in a town smaller even than Sedgeby.

In the dark, the village looked strangely mysterious and dingy: a store resembling a cavern, dimly lighted by coal-oil lamps; snow in patchy drifts, dirty and shrunk from recent thawings. John Elliot stumped along the single street till he found a livery barn. A gruff young fellow was sitting in the overheated office, his feet propped up on the front of a broken box-stove.

"You know where Harvey lives, Kenneth Harvey?"

"Yea. Eight miles north and half a mile west, after you hit the correction line."

"I want a team. How much?"

"Wait'll I ask the boss."

And the young fellow rose, uncouth and formidable in the dim light of the smoky lantern.

John Elliot stood about, forlorn and lonesome, in the dark.

"Four dollars and a half," the young fellow grumbled when he returned.

"When do I start?"

"Soon's I get the harness on the ponies."

Two hours or so later, after having driven uphill and downhill, over prairie roads and narrow, bare grades, the team stopped in front of a large, grey-painted house with white trimmings. It looked almost uncannily dead and quiet in the night. But from a barn, in the hollow beyond, the dull bark of an old dog rang across.

A light flashed up in one of the rooms. John Elliot fumbled in his pocket for money. He found it and paid the driver.

"You know them?" the young fellow asked.

"Yes," John Elliot replied without encouraging further familiarity.

A moment later Kenneth, tall, strong, and handsome, stepped out through the door. With a backward swing of his head he threw his long, black hair out of his face.

"Doggone it!" he said. "It's you, is it?"

"Can you put me up for the night?"

"You bet. Where's your grip. Walk in."

John Elliot entered. A door opened from the right. It was Isabel.

"Father!" she cried.

He stood and held his cheek up, pointing to the place where he wanted to be kissed.

Then, by the light of the lamp which she held, he looked at his daughter. She was not yet forty but in appearance she was nearer fifty. He frowned as he saw her short hair.

She turned to the stove and busied herself in lighting a fire, trembling with the excitement of the surprise. As she bent down for fuel, her ragged skirt

of flimsy gingham came up so that he could see her strong, bony knees; her legs were bare.

Kenneth had lingered outside, talking to the driver. Now he, too, entered.

"Doggone it!" he said, smiling. "This is a surprise!"

He stood bent forward, one shoulder higher than the other, making the impression as if his body were suspended from above, not resting on hips and feet. His feet, like Isabel's, were bare.

Isabel turned. "Ken," she said, "you take the bedstead upstairs for father." She winked at him as she spoke, with a lisp in her voice. "You know, father," she went on, "we have Ken's mother with us. So we can't put you up down here. But there's a large room upstairs. It's an attic."

"All right," John Elliot said. "All right."

"Tya," Kenneth made. "Well. Doggone it. Yes."

And, as if he were collecting his thoughts from a previous confusion, he brushed his glossy, black hair back with his hand and turned to go into the adjoining room. A moment later, creaking noises proceeded thence, as of a bed that was being moved and taken to pieces.

John Elliot sniffed. "What are you burning there?" he asked sharply.

Isabel laughed as she looked up. "Oh, father," she said, greatly embarrassed. "Well, you know, wood and coal cost money. Buffalo chips. You know."

But John Elliot did not know; so he stepped close and looked; and Isabel raised an old, battered kettle

which held the fuel; it consisted of the dry manure of horses and cows.

John Elliot took his sheep-skin coat off and sat down at the table.

"I'll have a bit of supper for you in a moment," Isabel said.

Her lisping voice, deep in pitch, and tinged with a suggestion of hoarseness, sounded strange. It was partly because she spoke to her father as she might have spoken to a child, partly because she was so embarrassed.

When she came to the table and dropped her strong, heavy body into a chair, she went on with a smile, "If I'd only known, father! Ken would have been down to fetch you. And the house! Goodness me! What a state you find us in!"

"I didn't know myself till last night."

Kenneth passed through the kitchen, carrying parts of a bedstead, and climbed a narrow, steep stairway without banisters which led up from a corner of the room.

Isabel rose and returned to the stove. The smell of steeping coffee reached her father's nostrils.

"Well," she asked while she set the table with broken dishes, "now you are here, you are going to stay for some time, aren't you, father?"

"I don't know."

"The farm . . ."

"The farm is rented."

"Oh," Isabel exclaimed, "that's good!"

John Elliot hardly knew what to think of his reception. Of genuine gladness at seeing him there was

none. He had the impression that Isabel's principal problem was to make things appear somewhat less crude and bad than they were. He was on the alert for every shade of feeling that arose.

He ate sparingly and in silence. And as soon as Kenneth announced that his bed was ready, he rose and went upstairs, proceeded by Isabel who carried a lamp.

There, when he had been left alone, he looked at the bed and frowned. The sheet was an old, torn table-cloth with drawn-work insertions.

He lay down without fully undressing. Indifferent as, in his own house, he had become to decorum and even to cleanliness, from sheer necessity, here he mistrusted everything. But, the night being quiet, with that quietness of the fields which was to be found only in the open country where all noises were familiar, he slept and slept profoundly and long.

Daylight had come before he awoke.

When he went down, he found two big boys of fifteen or sixteen lounging about in the kitchen; and with them was a small boy of possibly five.

Isabel entered. "Well, there you are, father. These are three of the children; the two oldest twins and Phil, the youngest. The other three are away to school. Come on, Phil, shake hands with grandpa."

John Elliot looked sharply at these grandchildren of his. He was not pleased; but he did not say a word.

A moment later a white-haired old woman entered from the adjoining room.

"This is my father, mother," Isabel said. "I guess, you know Mrs. Harvey, too, father?"

Mrs. Harvey smiled. Her face was yellow; its skin, loose and drawn together in deep corrugations. An enormous, narrow nose dominated her senile features.

"Well," she said with her weak, aged voice, "this was quite a surprise."

Oddly, he had the impression as if this woman of over eighty were trying to flirt with him; and he drew himself up stiffly.

"Jim," Isabel said, "get some buffalo chips."

Jim grunted. He was lounging on one of the only two chairs. He kicked at his brother's shins. "You go, Charlie!"

"Naw."

"Jim!" Isabel said sharply, "you do as I tell you!"

The boy, with a grin at his brother, rose in a leisurely way.

"I suppose Kenneth is at the shop?" Mrs. Harvey asked.

"Yes, mother," Isabel answered. "Mr. Millar came to get some work done."

She was setting the breakfast table for two.

After breakfast, John Elliot rose.

"Well, father," Isabel asked, "what do you intend to do?"

He reached for his sheep-skin. "Have a look around."

The house stood on a hill and faced south. All about, the prairie sloped away. In the draw to

the north stood a number of buildings, half decayed. One was the barn.

John Elliot went down and looked at the horses: old, poor-looking stock, not one without its flaw.

To the west, in the flank of a hill, a dug-out gaped, its outer wall built of sod. A horseless buggy stood in front of its entrance. He strolled across.

"Well, did you sleep?" a voice addressed him before his eyes had adjusted themselves to the darkness within.

He grunted.

Slowly he began to see. A horse was tied to a post driven into the earthen floor. To the right stood a portable forge; to the left, on a pile of old boards, sat Kenneth Harvey with a stranger. Kenneth wore an old Mackinaw coat which looked almost crimson; a fold below the collar betrayed that it had been blue.

"Shake hands with Mr. Millar," he said and rose. "Well," he added to the stranger, "we better go." And, turning to his father-in-law once more, "I've got a doggone meeting on at Mr. Millar's. Farmers' Union, you know. Wheat pool."

John Elliot stood and watched him as, with his incomprehensibly slow and lazy movements, he hitched the horse between the shafts of the buggy.

The stranger climbed to the seat and reached for the lines. Kenneth lifted himself to his side.

"Well," he said, turning back as the horse walked away, "be good! Don't get drunk, boy! And don't take any wooden money!" His handsome face flashed in a humorous smile.

John Elliot jerked his head and stalked away.

At the house, Isabel was on her knees, scrubbing the floor.

Mrs. Harvey stood at the window, looking after her son. The boys had disappeared.

Mrs. Harvey shook her head with an affectionate smile. "Always busy! Kenneth, my boy. Some meeting, I suppose? He is so popular."

John Elliot went out again as if he were lost.

Dinner time came; and Kenneth returned.

When the table was set, Isabel called for her father. The three boys had already taken their seats on the bench along the wall.

John Elliot, too, sat down. Mrs. Harvey took her seat by his side, sharing the bench. There were only two chairs, at the ends of the table, for Kenneth and Isabel. Mrs. Harvey murmured a prayer.

"Well, fellahs," Kenneth addressed the assembly, turning to his father-in-law, "make out your dinner! Wade in!"

John Elliot looked very straight ahead. All through the meal which consisted of meat and potatoes, he did not say a word. But he watched the others. They ate with their knives, with smacking sounds of their lips.

Mrs. Harvey bore the expense of the limited conversation.

It seemed that on the previous day a Mrs. Blackburn had called at the house.

"Her hair is whiter than mine, is it not?" she asked several times.

And Kenneth answered every time, "Sure, mother, it is."

But, with the same regularity, one of the boys protested, "No, it ain't."

When dinner was over, John Elliot rose. "How far is it to Gladys' place?" he asked.

"A mile," Isabel said. "I can't go before four o'clock, father. If you'll wait till then, I'll take you over in the sleigh. As soon as the children come home from school."

"All right." And he turned to the stairway.

"Wait, father," she cried. "I'll run up first and make your bed."

But he had already preceded her.

Upstairs, while putting his bed to order—which was the only piece of furniture in the attic, apart from a shelf—Isabel went on, "Well, father, I suppose you find things pretty bad."

He raised his hand with an expressive gesture, half angry, half compassionate.

"Well, you will see Gladys, of course. And Norman. They will tell you all kinds of stories. It is bad, I'll admit. But what do you want? We've tried the town; and Ken made good money. But when you've got to buy everything, even water! Yes, we had to pay ten cents a pail for water. And when we pulled out and went back to a farm, we arrived there with fifty cents and not a piece of furniture; with nothing; and we were renting at that. Kenneth tore the floor of the shanty up and made bunks from the lumber."

Her father looked aghast. He began to stump up and down.

Isabel was silent for a minute or so. Then, "You

will hear all this from others, I suppose. And a good deal more. I have found, since my marriage, that nobody is so uncharitable in his judgments as one's own relatives. That is why I tell you all this beforehand. There was a time when we never knew where the next meal was going to come from. Sometimes I had to send the children to bed hungry at night. And there was no crop to look forward to. We had no cow; no chickens even."

John Elliot stopped. Just what the expression on his face betokened, it would have been hard to tell. He cleared his throat and asked angrily, "Why did you not let me know?"

"I'll tell you that, too. Already it was being said that we had lived on Ken's people for years. Whether it is true or not, I don't know. Perhaps it is. Believe me, if I did not go to you, it was not because I did not think of it. But there was something else. I knew that more than one of your children and your sons-in-law were just waiting for some one to start and to ask you for help. If we had done so, they would have pounced on you and would soon have left you nothing.—And there is still another reason which I don't care to talk about.

"I know they are going to tell you stories. And mind you, father, I don't say that there is no truth in them. I merely want to say a word in my defence. There are certain things which we have never done. We have never asked anybody else to go on our note and then left that note to the other person to pay. We've never run a store-bill which we couldn't shoulder." Isabel laughed. "They will tell you, we couldn't

because we had no credit. And it's true. The fact remains we haven't done it. Nor have we ever, since we've had crops again—small enough crops, God knows—hailed part of our wheat out in the dead of night and hidden it in order to defraud our landlord.

"A certain person will tell you—and she is right; for she does not know any better; she is the oldest; and perhaps we don't quite appreciate what she went through when mother died; and we all know that she does not know what we know—she'll tell you that at least they have always had their living; that they've never gone hungry or felt cold because there wasn't enough fuel or clothing; that they've never burned buffalo chips either. Perhaps not. But, as I said, she did not know where it came from; she doesn't know to this day that her husband has borrowed and stolen and that he owes money to every person he knows, even to me. Ask Norman. Not that Norman is any better. But he can tell you at least. We have very little more than nothing; and I've raised six children such as they are."

John Elliot had sat down. His head was a-whirl. He did not at once grasp the meaning, much less the significance of all that was being said to him. But, when Isabel wound up, his mind fastened on to her last words, and he said testily, "Well, the way the children behave, I don't like that at all."

Isabel straightened her back. "No," she said. "I guess not. You are thinking of your own family when we were their age. But let me tell you. Mother did not stook in the field nor stack the hay. She did not ride the plow when her husband went to town. She

did not have to milk five cows in order to have the most necessary groceries in the house. Nor did she have to supply the energy that kept her man going and at work."

Her father sat as if the ground were yielding under his feet. "Do you mean to say that—that you've come to despise your husband?"

"Oh no," Isabel laughed; but there was also a sob in her laugh. "I don't despise him. He's good to the children. As far as his lights go, he is good to me. But he can't understand that it is no achievement if he supplies the mere daily bread. When Cathleen or Hennie send me clothes, cast-off things, for myself, or the children, or even for him, he is glad because there is that much less that he has to look out for. There isn't a thread in what I have on my body that I've *bought*."

John Elliot lay back on his bed and closed his eyes; he did not want to hear any more.

Isabel went to the trap of the stairway. But, when she was on the point of tiptoeing down, she saw her father raising a hand as if to detain her.

"When," he asked with a husky voice, "when will you be ready to take me to Gladys'?"

"As soon as the children come home," she said. "They have the sleigh. I let them drive because this time of the year they get too wet when they walk."

Again he closed his eyes; and she went down.

John Elliot's thoughts were confused. In fact, the turmoil in his brain could not be called thought. He tried to banish thought and to wipe from the slate

of his vision what pictures and thoughts thronged up out of hidden sources. A hundred different impulses were at work in him: the resultant was a desire to get away.

He waited and waited, looking at his watch and growing impatient at the insufferable slowness of time. He felt a captive.

Mentally, he was not in a position to be just or to differentiate values. He was exhausted, too tired even to defend himself against visions and auditions which surged up. "Wade in!" he heard from out of a confusion of voices. "Be good! Don't get drunk! Don't take any wooden money!" And then the general appellation which included him, "Fellahs!"

When a patient is subjected to the action of an anæsthetic, there is a stage in the gradual loss of consciousness when the connivance with the administration of the drug—the knowledge that this must be gone through for an ultimate good—ceases to be active. A great fear invades the patient; when he feels that he has lost control, when he is "slipping over"; the fear that now they will be able to do with him as they please; when the artificial sleep that forces itself upon him is in no way distinguished from death—for it is accompanied by the brief but terrible distress of asphyxia. When that stage arrives, the patient begins to struggle. He lifts a protesting hand as if he were going to tear from his face that mask through which the poison enters his body. In reality, the motion of his hand is no more than a waving of fingers; intensely pathetic and pitiful to him who looks on.

Thus did John Elliot resist as he sank into sleep.

He, too, raised his hand in little spasmodic motions, as if he wished to ward off the coming unconsciousness and whatever might happen to him in that sleep when he lay at the mercy of those who were awake and, worse, of his dreams.

Isabel called him at last. The children were at home, the sleigh was waiting. She was ready to take him to Gladys.

He rose; but he did not fully rouse himself. He climbed down into the kitchen and still was not quite awake. He sat down on a chair.

There was nobody in the room except Mrs. Harvey and Isabel. Isabel was pointing out to the old lady what was to be done in case she was late for supper.

Suddenly, startingly, the door was flung open; and Phil, the youngest of the boys, came stumbling in.

"Mamma!" he cried, with a voice half urgent, half wailing, "where are them other guys?"

John Elliot sat up and coughed. The memory of that moment had come back to him when, a few hours ago, he had been "slipping over" and had heard certain words addressed to him by this child's father: words which had had the effect upon him as of preparations on the part of the surgeon to begin operations.

He rose and stumped out to climb into the home-made sleigh that stood at the door.

Within twenty minutes that sleigh, driven by Isabel, stopped in front of a small, weather-beaten, unpainted house.

Our Daily Bread

"Hi, there!" Isabel sang out, hailing whoever might be inside.

And at the little, square window to the right of the door, a face appeared.

The next moment the door was opened; and Gladys stood in its frame.

She looked as she had looked ever since her mother's illness and death; but her hair, cut short like Isabel's, was greying: she was forty-seven years old. Her sight, as she stood there, small, thin, slightly bent over, and clasping her fore-arms with her hands, was strangely pathetic, her expression strangely wistful.

"Father!" she said as if a thunderbolt had struck her. For a moment, even after that recognition, she remained motionless. Then she came slowly down the three steps.

The house, like the one in which Isabel lived, stood on the crest of a treeless hill. The whole landscape was, in the evening light, suggestive of a sea with enormous billows gone rigid. The quality of the sunlight was that of a rayless, heatless diffusion through a lens of vapour.

She came and pecked at her father's cheek; a kiss of indifference.

He sat as if he were merely going by and had stopped for no more than a greeting.

"Well," Gladys said, "come in, father. You, too, Isabel."

But Isabel was thinking swiftly. She had had her say. Let Gladys have hers.

"No," she said. "I'll go home. I'll come for father after supper. He can stay with me."

"No," Gladys exclaimed. "No, no! We can make up a bed for him here. You'll stay, won't you, father?"

"Yes," he said as if he were merely obeying an order. He rose and alighted.

"Well," Isabel said, "I'll bring his suitcase over, then."

"Go right in, father," Gladys invited. "Sit down. Make yourself at home. I'll have just a word with Isabel."

And again he obeyed.

"When did he come?" Gladys asked quickly, in a whisper.

"Last night."

"How is he? Restless as ever?"

"Yes. He has grown old."

"I'm afraid of him," Gladys whispered. "Just as mother was."

"No!" Isabel cried incredulously.

"Yes! I thought I had grown beyond it. I am getting old myself. But the moment I saw him I knew if he scolded, I'd tremble."

"Well," Isabel said as if she wished to put an end to the conversation, "I'll bring that suitcase. Get up!"

And she left Gladys standing there, in the strange, orange light of the sinking sun, reflected from patches of snow that were recongealing in the evening chill.

Gladys turned to the house.

There, John Elliot was walking up and down and straining his eyes. He was neither short nor far-

sighted; but his eyes were getting dim; and it was half dark already inside.

Yet, he had seen enough. The furniture was good and well kept. Everywhere white scarfs of drawn-work and embroidery were spread, just as they had been in the shack of the homestead north of Sedgeby. But the house itself was single-boarded; and the joists were covered, on the inside, with nothing but lath, unplastered.

"Yes," Gladys said tonelessly, divining what he had been doing, "you may well look. You know, we've been moving every year. We have just bought this place. For nine dollars an acre. We have been here only three weeks. We intend fixing it all up this coming fall."

"Where are the children?"

"The children? Don't you know that Norah is married? Charlie is working out."

Well, those were details. But John Elliot had not heard of them. By this time he knew that he was not going to stay. He must ask about many things. To collect his thoughts, he went to the window and looked out.

There, at the horizon, he caught sight of a farmstead enclosed by trees like his own.

"Who lives there?"

Gladys stepped up behind him and peered over his shoulder. "There? A young fellow by the name of Marlow. Gordon Marlow. He's a neighbour of Norman's."

Others had prosperous farmsteads; his children had not!

He turned and walked up and down.

Meticulously Gladys fitted herself into a chair.

He gave angry vent to his thought. "There are prosperous farmsteads all over the country. As prosperous as mine. Why is it that only my children . . ."

Gladys laughed mirthlessly. "I'll tell you, father. Gordon inherited his place from his father. Our place would look the same if we were living on your farm."

He jerked his head up. The implied reproach hit him like a slap in the face. He was getting old, though; and the fitting reply did not come to mind till it was too late to utter it. He sat down.

"If we had been able to hold on to our homestead, father, our place also would look different by now," Gladys said. "It is nearly thirty years since we took it up. But we lost it. Through no fault of our own. For a small sum, too, a thousand dollars! We could not pay it. What could we do? Go to you? Never! If the Harveys did not, we were not going to do so. All things come to him who waits. There will be something coming to us one day, I suppose. We are not like Fred Sately who must discount his expectations. Meanwhile we've been renting. We've lived. It was not always easy. No. But we've lived. We've never gone hungry. As Harveys have."

A sudden impulse of low cunning seemed to brush John Elliot's anger away. He wanted to find out about Isabel's secret. He cleared his throat; and Gladys ceased speaking.

"Why has Isabel never come to me? I should not have let her suffer."

Again Gladys laughed. It was too dark by this

time, his sight too dim, to recognise the expression in her face. "I'll tell you that, too, father. You don't know Kenneth the way I do. I have lived next to him for close to ten years. And I've seen things which you wouldn't see if you lived in his house for a lifetime. They would not let you see them; for Isabel, no matter what she says, is just as much afraid of you as I am. Yes, we are afraid of you. We, your children. You've been a stern father to us when we were still at home. I don't say that I blame you. We have much to be thankful for, I suppose. We are honest and clean. As for your question about Isabel, I'll tell you exactly how it is.

"She has never come to you because she, too, is an Elliot.

"And Kenneth! Suppose you gave him to-day a cheque for a thousand dollars. I don't think he'd squander it as Norman would. But he'd stop work. He'd live on the money till it is gone. Look at Isabel! What does she wear? She never complains. Not she. Till Cathleen was here, five or six years ago, she had nothing but rags: dresses made out of flour bags. From that time on Cathleen, Margaret, and Hennie have kept her in clothes; her and the children; and him, too, by the way.

"I tell you, father, Kenneth is no good; that is the secret of it. And Isabel knows it; but she will never let on. What man would be satisfied to let his wife go about in clothes that are given to her? Year after year? But tell you? She'd rather die!"

Her father cleared his throat as he always did when he wrestled with a thought. "Yes. We see the faults

in others. You talk of Kenneth. How about Frank?"

"That is different," Gladys said promptly. "We lost our homestead. You know what renting means. You have only half your crop. That's why I said at last, let us buy! We've bought on half crops, too, of course. But slowly we'll be getting ahead. We have our horses. Nothing brilliant. But they'll do the work. We've got the taxes to pay this way; and the interest. But with a little good luck!"

John Elliot wanted to see how much she knew of her own position. "Any debt?"

"Debt?" Gladys seemed to shrink in the dusk. "Well, we have one bad debt. You know what I mean. John has written to you about it?"

"No."

"Isabel has told you?"

"She said something."

"Well, I did not know about it till recently. I found a letter of John's. I asked Frank; and he told me."

"And did you not blame him?"

"Father," she exclaimed in great distress. "I have had sleepless nights over it, many, many! No. I did not blame him. Frank is honest. What could he do? That note—it is two hundred dollars—that note fell due at a time when Frank could not pay. Could not. What was he to do? He simply did not have the money. It fell upon John. I've worried, worried!"

"Where's Frank?" her father asked.

"At the barn. He's overhauling the plow."

John Elliot rose. "I'll go down. Which way?"

"I'll show you. Meanwhile I'll get supper."

As John Elliot reached the stable, a man was going ahead of him through the driveway, carrying straw on a fork poised over his shoulder. It was almost dark.

John Elliot coughed.

The man had entered a stall, turned, and peered short-sightedly back. "Who is it?"

"I, Elliot."

"Oh, father!" Frank came to meet him, hand outstretched.

John Elliot ignored the hand. "I want to speak to you," he said. "Where she can't hear. We need light. Have you a lantern?"

Frank's narrow face blanched in the dark. "Yes."

And, when he had taken the lantern from a nail in a beam and lighted it, he asked, "Where? Behind the barn?"

"Anywhere." And John Elliot led the way.

They sat down on a stone boat. The lantern stood in front of them on the ground. From the west came the last ghostly light reflected from a cloud.

John Elliot took a paper from the pocket of his vest and fingered it. "How much is that note that went back on John?"

"Four hundred dollars."

"You told Gladys two hundred."

"Yes." Frank's face looked dispirited and despondent.

"It was four hundred when John endorsed it?"

"Yes."

"How much when it fell back on him, with interest and executions added?"

"I don't know exactly. Seven hundred perhaps."

"Is it paid?"

"I don't know."

"It is not. It is still growing."

"I suppose so."

"What are you going to do about it?"

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"How about Norman?"

"Norman?"

"How much do you owe him?"

Frank rebelled. "I don't see . . ."

John Elliot cut him short. All his faculties were on the alert. "You don't, do you? No. I suppose not. Is it true or not that, when you were renting, you hauled wheat out at night and hid it in order to defraud your landlord?"

Frank rose, ghastly white. "I wish," he said slowly, "you would mind your own business. Is that what you came for?"

"That? What? No, sir. Just a moment. I have something here. And your good luck that it fell into my hand!" He held out the cheque which he had paid. "Do you know where you would be if I had not settled this? You do. Well, I'll tell you. You issued this cheque because you knew that, on my account, no prosecution would follow. You counted on it when you wrote it that I should square it for you. Am I right?"

Frank was in a white rage. "Right or not. If you were not Gladys' father . . ."

"You'd hit me, would you?"

"I'd show you off the place."

Something seemed to snap in John Elliot's brain. He trembled. But he was suddenly quiet.

"No need," he said. "No need."

And with shaking knees he went down to the road, past the house in which a lamp was burning now.

He turned south and went on.

Every now and then he stopped to conquer again the tumult in his heart. But, whenever he had been standing for a few seconds, bent over his cane, he went on again as if trying to escape from something.

There was no longer any thought in him: nothing but a void. Yet the exertion of his failing energies—the very toil of walking—gave a savage satisfaction which was almost physical.

About him, the universe seemed to reel. But he stood and walked, bent on his cane. He stood in a world which was falling to ruins.

Meanwhile, at the house, Frank had told Gladys part of what had passed at the barn.

Gladys listened as if she were merely curious to understand, withholding judgment.

"How was it?" she asked. "You showed him off the place?"

"No. I said I should do so if he were not your father."

"Why?" Gladys was puzzled, but not indignant. "Why? But never mind. There will be time for that later. We must go after him. Quick. Get the sleigh."

Frank returned to the barn.

But before he had finished harnessing a team—he

had only the bob-sleighs—Gladys came running from the house, a man's coat loosely flung over her shoulders.

"Never mind, Frank. Isabel's here with the suitcase. I'll take the lantern. Go to the house. Supper's on the stove. I'll go with her. We must find him. He is out of his mind."

She ran away; and then she was driving along the road with her sister. In the soft, crushed snow, her father's foot-prints, by the light of a lantern, had clearly shown them the direction.

"But I don't understand," Isabel said excitedly.

"I don't either. Go on. Find him."

And Isabel whipped the horse with her lines.

They overtook him a little over a mile from Frank's corner. He was sitting on a stone and stared at them as the light of the lantern fell on his bearded face.

Gladys alighted and approached. "Come, father," she said gently. "You went the wrong way."

He did not reply. But when she put her hand under his arm, he resisted.

Isabel bent forward. "Father," she said, "you know me, don't you?"

He snorted. "Know you? Of course, I know you."

"You'll come back with me, won't you, father?"

That moment, out of a sea of memories, a single thought stood out: that of the moment at which sleep had overmastered him in her house, in the afternoon, when he was struggling against the coming unconsciousness.

"No," he said and shook his head.

Our Daily Bread

The two women consulted by a look. Gladys, almost imperceptibly, shrugged her shoulders.

"Will you come back to Gladys'?"

Again he shook his bearded head.

"What can we do?" Isabel whispered to her sister.

Gladys nodded. "I've got it." And, turning to her father, "Father, you haven't seen Norman yet. Surely, you won't leave this district without seeing Norman? Come on. We'll take you to his place. Shall we?"

He seemed to deliberate.

Then, without saying a word, he rose and approached the sleigh.

Greatly relieved, Gladys and Isabel helped him to the seat; and Gladys crouched down in front.

A short half hour's drive brought them to Norman's yard which, in contrast to the others, was fenced. His was level land, almost black, for the snow had largely melted.

The house, unpainted, squatted right on the prairie which stretched away bare and treeless like the hills.

Gladys ran into the house while Isabel helped her father to alight.

A moment later a short, round-faced young man of thirty or so came flying out of the house.

"Father?" he cried. "Sure. We'll be glad to have him. There you are." And he shook the old man by the hand.

"Come right in." And he took his arm.

In the kitchen, a tall, fat woman was standing in a loose housedress; a girl of eight or nine sat in a chair; two smaller children were playing about.

John Elliot shot quick, shrewd glances from right to left as he shook hands in answer to introductions.

Gladys and Isabel were both trying to convey some message to their brother. But he did not understand it. While he looked from one to the other, he went on talking in his quick and boisterous way.

"Had your supper? Well, now, we are just through. But, of course, it won't take more than a minute . . ."

John Elliot had recovered from his exhaustion; but, as is apt to be the case with old people, he retained some impulse of aversion, of flight from his daughters; and so he declined.

"No. No. I'm not hungry."

"Well," Norman went on, "come into the room, then. Or would you like to lie down?"

"I think so. Yes."

Behind the kitchen lay a dining room, reasonably large and well furnished. Behind the dining room, there were two bed-rooms.

Norman, who was carrying a lamp in one hand and his father's suitcase in the other, went into the one to the left.

John Elliot, still in his sheep-skin, and walking with his cane, followed on his heels.

Norman kept up a running patter of talk. "This is our bed-room, Dorothy's and mine. But we've got a spare bed in the other. You'll have this one all to yourself." And meanwhile he was stripping the bed-clothes off and replacing them with fresh ones, sheets and pillow slips.

"Well, father," he said at last, cheerfully, "I'll leave

you, then. I hope you'll rest well. Good-night."

In the kitchen, Dorothy had lighted another lamp.

Gladys and Isabel who were hardly on speaking terms with their sister-in-law stood by the door, whispering together.

Norman entered, smiling broadly. He had all the features of his brother John, his protruding eyes, his heavy underlip, and his small stature. But in him they were not prominent to the point of ugliness; on the contrary, they formed a pleasing and distinctly good-looking whole.

"Well," he said to his sisters, "the old man surprised us at last, did he? What was wrong?"

"He had run away," Isabel said. "We had quite a time in getting him back into the sleigh."

"I don't know," Gladys added darkly, "what we'd have done if I had not thought of you."

Norman laughed. "Good thing you did, then."

CHAPTER XIII

JOHN ELLIOT COMPARES TWO OF HIS SONS

JOHN ELLIOT had a good night's rest; and it restored his unbalanced feelings to the semblance of an equilibrium.

But he had given the rein to his temper, not in the way of youth but of old age; and no experience is ever lost in human life.

As soon as he stirred—it was at his usual hour, before five o'clock—Norman, ordinarily a late sleeper, rose to prepare breakfast. Not that Norman was anxious to show himself filial and dutiful; but what little he had heard from his sisters, on the previous night, had stirred him into a state of excitement. His father was almost a stranger to him.

John Elliot joined him in the kitchen.

To all appearances, the old man was as ever, restless and somewhat morose; but, though he wondered at seeing Norman and not his wife working over the stove, cooking porridge and preparing tea, he did not say a word. He merely watched every movement of his son's with what might have been interpreted as a sort of suspicious curiosity.

When Norman opened the cellar trap, he approached and sniffed at the odour which rose from the opening in the floor. When he brought up a pail of milk to skim it—there was no separator—he glanced

at the cream which covered the bluish liquid like a coherent skin; and he frowned. When, in the dining room, Norman set the table, his father looked at the dishes as if he were basing profound conclusions on their appearance; there was a cut-glass sugar bowl with a silver lid which attracted his special attention.

But it was not Norman's nature to remain silent.

"Well, father," he said at last, "I must show you over the place this morning. Quite a farm, I tell you. Three quarter sections. I rented it for four or five years. Then I bought. Renting's unsatisfactory all around, for the landlord as well as the tenant. And I sure had a good landlord. Whatever I did, in the line of improvements, he paid for, breaking and all."

He paused for a moment. His father had listened, stopping in his walk and lending ear as if he were anxious not to lose a single word. But he said nothing in reply.

Norman went on. "He sure treated me right. And when I bought, he did so again. Half-crop payments, of course. And, since I had not enough equipment to swing the things, he waived all interest for the first year. Next year, when he came up—he lives in California—I showed him where I had to build a real barn and a granary and to fence a pasture and the yard; and he agreed to let the interest go for another three years—to buy wire and lumber with."

This time John Elliot did ask a question, but in a single word. "Price?"

"For the land? Forty dollars an acre."

John Elliot gave a short grunt.

"Eh?" Norman asked.

But his father had resumed his walk, with a motion as if he felt sorry that he had betrayed his feelings.

"You think that's high?" Norman asked. "I tell you, father, this isn't the rough hill land which Frank has, or Kenneth. Every inch of it can be tilled. And I am a worker. When I get out into the field, I make the dust fly. I don't crawl along like Frank. And I don't start work at ten o'clock either, like Kenneth. Watch me! And people know it. Let Frank or Ken go to town and try to get a bag of flour on credit! They can't. But I run a store bill from one end of the year to the other. And at the bank! Why, I suppose you know Frank. Kenneth has never had any standing. But I! I went to town last Monday to see the manager of the bank. To Stonehill, I mean. We have no bank at Faulknor. I figured it would cost me about two hundred dollars to get my seed in, what with repairs and feed that I've got to buy and a little seed I am short of. Well, on the way in, I thought the whole thing over. He'll beat me down, I thought. If I ask for two hundred, he'll give me a hundred and fifty. So I made up my mind to ask for three hundred. You must know how to handle these guys. But, by jingo! He merely reached for a note, filled it out, and tossed it across to me to sign. I got my two hundred and a hundred of spending money besides."

John Elliot stared at his son. He saw him headed for bankruptcy. He did not say a word—his silence being the result of the shocks he had received the previous day. But, had he spoken, his speech would have run as follows, "If you are immature enough

to accept three hundred dollars when you need only two hundred, then you are too immature to handle money at all!"

Norman, all unconscious of the significance of his father's stare, went on exposing himself and his boyish lack of forethought and experience.

"By jingo, dad," he said, forgetting that his father abhorred being thus addressed, "he's a mighty fine man, that bank manager at Stonehill. But there's one thing I can't understand about him. He asked me all kinds of questions, of course; about that deal of mine, for the land, for instance. And he said that in his opinion nobody can ever pay for a farm on half-crop payments. By jingo, I said to him, I'll show you it can be done. I believe you are honest, he said; and I'll loan you money so long as your notes are properly secured. But believe me, I've been looking on at this game for thirty years; and if you ask me, I'll tell you that you are working for your landlord and for nobody else. Sit down, father! Porridge? Here's cream. And a cup of tea? No, sir. I said, not with my contract. He raised his eyebrows. Any special contract? he asked. Well, listen here, I said. Out of the crop the threshing bill is paid and the twine. And what's left over is divided in two. He laughed; and he said a funny thing. The dog will get you, he said; and if the dog doesn't, the cat will! Now what do you think he meant by that?"

John Elliot started at the sudden question. "What interest?" he grunted.

"Interest? On the land? Six percent. It amounts to eleven hundred and fifty-two dollars a year."

"Suppose the half crop is less?"

"What difference can it make? The unpaid balance is simply added to the principal."

"And the principal grows. The banker is right."

"But, father, I tell you. He gets the half crop. What's the odds what the principal amounts to, anyway?"

John Elliot fingered his spoon with a nervous motion. He did not reply at once; he did not want to anger the boy. What that boy lacked was knowledge. Knowledge could be acquired or imparted. So he said very quietly, almost humbly, "You'd be better off renting. You would not have to pay taxes, interest, and repairs out of your share. The price of this land is put at a figure which, at six percent, pays him twenty on his investment. What did he pay when he bought the land? Ten or twelve dollars an acre at the most; likely less. He is safe. You take all the risk. And at last he will insist on the interest being paid in notes if the half crop is insufficient. He'll get you through your notes if he does not get you through your default on the half crop."

"Default?" Norman exclaimed obstinately. "There won't be any default."

"There cannot but be a default sooner or later," his father said, carried away by the argument, for he had thought about these things for a good many years. "Poor crops are bound to come; years in which your share will be insufficient to cover your own expenses, your living, etc., even though you might happen not to be in debt, even though there might not yet be a lien on that precious half share of yours as there is this

year. That's what he means by the cat. The banker's right."

"I won't admit it!"

"No," John Elliot said in sudden wrath. "I'll tell you why we made a success of things in our generation. Because we listened to what the older people had to say. And if there was anything we did not understand, we trusted them nevertheless. They had had the experience; they knew; and we acknowledged that fact. But your generation won't listen. Because you can run a car, you think you are wise. In reality you merely insist on making a fool of yourself. You'll acknowledge it when, one day, that precious landlord of yours takes this farm from you, richer by all you've done on it, by the barn you've built, saving him the cost of labour; and by the fence you've drawn around pasture and yard."

John Elliot rose though he had only half finished his breakfast.

Norman was obstinate. "I don't see it. I don't see it!"

"Because you don't want to!" John Elliot thundered. "Because you are obstinate and opinionated! When does the train go?"

Norman's head was red. "Oh," he said, somewhat abashed, "if that's the way you feel about it! Eight o'clock. If you want to catch it, I'd better hitch up."

His father did not reply. He was stumping up and down.

Again, as last night, he was conscious of curious lapses in his mental activities; as if the continuity of time were broken; as if some heart, not of his body,

were missing beats. That feeling disquieted and frightened him. Instinctively he dropped his son and his own preoccupation with that son's affairs from his consideration and concentrated all his mental effort on the task of preserving his own identity.

Norman was hesitating at the door. But his father refrained from giving him as much as a look; and so he went out.

A few minutes later, the tall, fat woman of the evening before, Dorothy, Norman's wife, entered from the right, scowling, yawning, ill-humoured.

"What's all the racket about?" she grumbled and went into the kitchen.

John Elliot paid no attention to her. For a moment he had looked up; but, receiving no greeting, he continued stumping up and down.

From the kitchen came the noise of stove-lids, angrily thrown about.

John Elliot went into the bed-room and shouldered into his coat. He disapproved of this household. He wanted to leave.

Then he passed through the kitchen, carrying his suitcase. As he reached the door to the yard, he grumbled something that might be taken for a farewell.

Wide-eyed, her mouth open, the woman stared after him; as the door closed, she giggled.

On the other side of the level yard, between granary and barn, Norman was hitching a small, unruly horse between the shafts of the buggy.

John Elliot deposited his suitcase on the stoop and waited. When Norman drove up, handling his horse

Our Daily Bread

with the expert roughness of him who is not in the habit of sparing brute beasts, his father climbed to the seat.

Behind them, the door of the house was flung open.

"Eh, Norman!" his wife's voice rang out. "Don't you dare to go and leave me without wood and water! I know you, you scamp! You are off for the day!"

With a muttered curse Norman threw the lines down and sprang to the ground.

His father sat very still, almost without breathing. This glimpse at the relations between man and wife was the last thing that was needed to make him wish he had never come.

An hour or so later, when he and his son, without exchanging another word, had reached the town and were standing on the platform of the little station, Norman, unrepentant, but feeling uncomfortable nevertheless, stammered as the train pulled in, "Well, now, father, I'm sorry!"

"It's all right," the old man said grimly. "It's all right." And he turned to the steps of the nearest car.

Norman, as his wife had foreseen, did not go home, but to Gladys' place where he found Isabel who had come over, greatly worried. Both women stepped out on the stoop when, having stabled his horse, he came to the house.

"Well," Isabel cried, "how is father?"

"He's gone."

"Gone?" from Gladys and Isabel simultaneously.

"Yes. I took him to town. I'm coming from there."

"Isn't he queer?" Isabel exclaimed despondently.

"He's crazy!" Norman said.

"No!" Gladys whispered. "It's his age! He is older even than his years; has been since he lost mother. And he is seventy-four."

Again John Elliot sat in the train, self-contained, grim, hard. He felt deeply wounded; but he would not acknowledge it. To give in to that feeling would be equivalent to submitting to that which was conquering him: to all-destroying time. He would rather nurse anger: anger was a reaction of life.

In his pocket he had a ticket to Arkwright, Manitoba, whence he would reach John's place by team.

Once more he had to spend a night at Regina; and another at Winnipeg. In the latter city it never occurred to him to go to Cathleen's house. His mind was set on reaching John's place; he had no thought for anything else.

Yet, during the whole trip he was humbling himself. No matter how John received him; no matter what follies he was going to see, he would not say a word. He would not quarrel. He wanted a child of his simply to open his arms for him, to enfold him in love, as a mother enfolds her child. He wanted a refuge to rest from life.

From the city, he sent John a wire to announce his arrival, not thinking that the telegram was most unlikely to reach him in time.

But by chance it did reach him in time, for John happened to be in town when it came.

When John Elliot stepped off the train at Ark-

wright, the round-shouldered, almost hump-backed figure of his oldest son was the first thing he saw.

John was standing at the open entrance to the freight shed, clad in a curious grey ulster; its skirts were hanging down to his feet; but it was not wide enough to close over his enormous chest: one single button held the two front panels together around his narrow hips. Above, they opened like a flower-vase. On his head reposed a broad-rimmed hat of black felt; he had always affected the sombrero.

When John saw his father, a wide grin seemed to split his face horizontally; and he rolled his enormous eyes as he used to do when he was a boy in his teens. He raised both hands. In one of them he held a short whip which gave him the appearance of an old-time carter or stage driver waiting at a relay station for a change of horses; with the other he gave his father a hearty grip.

Somehow, at his mere sight, a large part of that indefinite and curious anxiety which had filled the old man during the last few days disappeared. John at least was prepared to give him what he was looking for.

"Well," John drawled, quite in the style of his youth, "I'm glad to see you, father. Mighty glad. Here we are back in Arkwright whence you hailed."

Together they went down the steps of the platform. The horses were tied to a telephone post. There was no expensive cutter of the kind which John had fancied in his Sedgeby days. There were no costly fur robes; only horse-hides; and about the whole outfit

there was a home-made air, solid in poverty, unpretending, yet contented.

They climbed in; and the horses started.

They went west on Main Street. New buildings had been erected in great numbers. John Elliot did not recognise the town; he had not seen it for fifty years. In spite of the many changes it looked flimsy and far from prosperous.

Once or twice, as they left the town behind, John Elliot senior began to speak and went silent again. At last he asked, "Do you ever hear of your sisters and brothers-in-law?"

"Yes," John said. "Cathleen and Ormond. Fact is, Ormond comes out quite often, over the week-end. Chances are, if you stay for a while, you'll see them. He's the only one of the family who's got any sense, to my mind. That's a coat of his I'm wearing. Plenty long enough as you see. A bit tight round about. But up and down it's plenty long enough."

"How are you making out?" his father asked.

"Oah! Far from brilliant. But I'm making it. Finally, I suppose, I'll come out on top."

"Debt getting less?"

"Mighty little. And yet . . ." He mused for a while. "You know, for the first few years I thought I'd dished myself. Lillian wanted me to quit and move to town. To open a butcher shop or something. Eh!" His gesture as well as his intonation was one of disgust. "I'm a farmer, after all. You can't starve on the farm."

His father coughed. He was not displeased.

"There's Harvey," John went on. "He tried it. They had to buy even their water."

"Yes. I know. I've seen them."

"Have you? How are they making out?"

The old man gave a snort of contempt.

"Getting nowhere, eh?" John said. "Well, I'll tell you. But this between you and me. I didn't get much encouragement at home. Mother didn't like the match. I was young and foolish, I guess. Yea, mother! If she hadn't died! You know, I believe mother was one of the best women on earth. Don't you think so?"

His father sat very stiff; his small, thin hands grasped the crook of his cane. His eyelids drooped; his pupils relaxed.

"Sure," John went on. "That's where the whole family went to pieces. I'd never have left the old homestead if she'd been alive."

Bitterness surged through the old man by his side. *He* had been unable to hold his son.

"But I suppose experience is the best teacher."

"How was the flax crop, the first one, in the boom?"

John laughed. "Crop was all right. But I'd put it in at enormous expense. Flax was six dollars when I seeded. I paid five dollars a day for help. By the time I threshed, I had to sell at a dollar and eighty. I lost money on every bushel. The more there was, the more I lost. Well, as Ormond says, I had to write it off as a tuition fee in the school of experience." He laughed. "You know, Ormond's quite a fellow. Much like yourself. When things came tough, a few years ago, I don't know what I'd have done if it

hadn't been for him. What! he said, be a hired man in town when you can be your own boss in your fields? What's money, he says. Don't start out on the farm to make money. Never mind who owns the land so long as you've got the use of it. Have a garden. Make your living, the daily bread."

His father nodded. "Wheat's wheat," he said, "no matter what it brings on the market!" He almost shouted his words; and in his sudden animation his voice sounded just like his son's.

Again, for a while, they drove on in silence, covering mile after mile. John the elder reflected. His son had at last learnt his lesson. Why had he not done so ten years ago? Because the continuity of the tradition was broken.

Meanwhile John was musing aloud once more. "The debt . . . It hasn't grown less. I paid nine thousand dollars for what sells at a thousand right now. Or rather, I didn't pay it. I owe it. But you know, there's a silver lining to every cloud. It's that very fact that protects me. Suppose they forced me out. The land would fall back on their hands and wouldn't hardly be worth anything at all. In a way, of course, I'm their slave. I've got to keep going to pay the interest. But they know, if they're hard on me, I'll simply quit; and then they lose more than I do. The worst of it was that just when times were hardest, after the war, all kinds of fool things I had done in my young days kicked back."

"Frank's note?"

"Yes, amongst others. You know about that? Seven hundred dollars. I shouldn't mind it so much

if he'd send me five or ten dollars now and then, so as to show his good will. The bank sicked the sheriff on to me and took my best horses when I could spare them least. But, ah! What's the use? It's cut and dried. In a year or two, if I have a crop, I'll pay the last of that, too . . . There's the place," he added, pointing with his whip.

Far ahead, to the right, a farmstead rose from the level prairie, barn, granary, house—unsheltered by any trees.

When they drove into the yard, two young girls, seventeen and sixteen years old, came to the door of the little white cottage. Behind them, a boy of possibly four toddled about in the shed that formed the entrance. Then, when the horses walked up to the stoop, a middle-aged woman, thin, smaller than her daughters, appeared, pushing through with an acid smile.

John Elliot rose, alighted, and was kissed in welcome.

Passing through the shed, he entered a kitchen, and to his right a small living room which held half a dozen chairs and a lounge.

"Well, father," John said. "Sit down. I'll put the horses in."

During his absence Lillian, sitting on the edge of a chair, made thin and irrelevant conversation. When had he started out? Where stopped?

John Elliot felt exhausted. He had reached a goal. His mental powers were shaded in twilight.

He answered with short, abrupt words which sounded ill-humoured.

The fact was that he strove to remember something. Something was not as he had expected it. He felt vaguely puzzled.

His son reentered with his broad smile and noticed the empty stare of his eye.

"Well, father," he said, "you are tired. Perhaps you would like to lie down?"

Obediently he rose; and John led him into a small room behind the kitchen.

He sat down on the bed. But when John made a motion as if to retire, he detained him by raising his hand.

"Yea?" John asked.

And with a sudden flash that something which was wrong revealed itself. "Where is Henry?" he asked.

John's face sobered. "You don't know, do you?"

"No. Isn't he with you?"

"He hasn't been with me for two years now. No. He's in Brandon."

"In Brandon, eh?" This was still more puzzling. But for the moment the exertion of grasping an entirely new fact proved too great. "All right," he said. And with a senile nod he prepared to recline.

In the dusk of the evening John junior had gone to the barn to milk when his father, with his stumping gait and aided by his cane, came across the yard; he was clad in sheep-skin and fur cap.

He did not say a word as he stopped by the rump of the cow.

John's head was leaning against the flank of the beast, in that millennia-old attitude of the milker. He

glanced up at his father; but, seeing the old man's abstracted expression, he merely nodded and did not speak.

His father answered the nod and then turned restlessly away, going from stall to stall in the roomy barn. Here and there he stopped and fingered the stanchions of the partitions, listening as the horses munched their hay. There were three cows and ten horses; among them, two or three mares of good stock.

The barn was well built of three-inch lumber, with an enormous loft above. John Elliot stumped about, swaying on his feet, and examined it all. But the expression of his face—a puzzled, abstracted expression—did not change. From time to time he grunted with a jerk of his head.

When John finished milking, he rose from his stool and stood for a moment in the open door of the barn, with a heavy pailful of milk in each hand, as if he were waiting for his father to join him. The old man, noticing it from the other end of the building, came at once, obedient to the summons implied.

They went to the house where a lamp had been lighted in the kitchen; and John junior started the separator going. Supper was laid on the table.

The little boy who had toddled about behind his sisters in the shed came and looked at his grandfather, one finger in his mouth, as if he were staring at some memorable sight.

Every now and then a fragmentary thought flashed through the old man's brain, accompanied by a jerky motion of his head and a twitching of his fingers.

That thought, not quite articulate, was the same every time. It was a dumb wonder at the peculiar vacancy of mind that had preceded it. He felt as if he had given in; as if he had surrendered the control over his life into other hands. The quiet rhythm of his son's activities on the farm had a lulling, soothing effect on him.

At supper he half noticed a few peculiarities: the affected way in which his daughter-in-law guided her food to her mouth; the prim, sharp way in which she corrected her children; the cutting irony with which she spoke to her husband, as if some one were present to whom she wished to demonstrate the fact of her own superiority. He noticed these things only half; for half consciously he closed his eyes to everything that was displeasing to him. The older daughter resembled her father in face and features. The little boy seemed strangely morose for a child so young.

Soon after supper, he went to his room and got into bed.

Next morning he awoke, as was his habit, very early. But he waited in bed till he heard others stirring. He found John in the kitchen, lighting the fire. A few minutes later, when he was washing, Lillian entered, fully dressed. In the small living room, east of the kitchen, he had a glimpse of the two big girls sleeping on the lounge. He inferred the fact that he had dispossessed them of their bed.

All day long he stumped about over the yard, now looking on where, under an open shed alongside the granary, north of the barn, John overhauled plow,

disk, and harrow, now going off by himself, to the little hen house, the barn, or the road.

Once, during the forenoon, he stopped by John's side and asked abruptly, "What did you say? Where's Henry?"

John looked up. "At Brandon. Henry's all right."

In the afternoon, he repeated the question.

At night, John asked, "Would you like me to drop the Ormonds a line and tell them you're here?"

"Eh?" his father asked; and, when John had repeated the question, he thought for a while before he answered, "You might."

Thus the days went by.

Once or twice striking lapses of memory occurred.

One afternoon, when he wished to lie down for a nap, he entered the wrong room; and there he rummaged about among Lillian's dresses, emitting angry little grunts because he could not find his suitcase.

On another occasion, when he had gone to the stable, he called for Norman to come and hitch Dolly up, calling several times, at last angrily. But when John came running, he merely grunted and answered his question as to what he wanted with a gruff, "Nothing. Nothing."

Two weeks later, in the midst of a thaw, John asked his father whether he would mind sleeping on the lounge for a night or two. He was expecting the Ormonds.

"They've got a girl, haven't they?"

"Yea. But Martha isn't coming along. She's at a boarding school."

The Ormonds arrived on Saturday, shortly after dinner, coming with a livery team from town.

Cathleen, tall, stately, and plump in her middle age, cried when she kissed her father. Woodrow looked heavy, square, and grey. Both seemed to be favourites with the children.

"Roy," Cathleen called to the little boy, "come here. Come to auntie. How far can you count, Roy?"

The boy whom Cathleen had lifted to her knees, struggled and replied, speaking slowly and plaintively, "Just up to one."

Cathleen and Woodrow burst out laughing; and John Elliot cackled in senile hilarity.

The afternoon went by under jesting and laughing. Yet, there was something strange about the visit. Thus, between Cathleen and Lillian an almost icy, ironical relation seemed to prevail. Cathleen, Woodrow, and John would laugh and joke; but Lillian was left out. Perhaps she was ostentatiously working about in the kitchen; or she went into her bed-room and slammed the door.

John Elliot noticed these things; but they did no longer affect him as they would have affected him only a few weeks ago.

Between him and this life of his children a sudden distance seemed to have intervened; he looked at their doings as he might have looked at far-away hills veiled in purple hazes.

Another thing he noticed was that between John and Cathleen glances, nods, and gestures were interchanged which referred to himself. He watched these

with a curiosity unalloyed by resentment. They seemed to imply that he had greatly aged; that he was hardly any longer quite human.

The Ormonds left early on Monday morning, driven by a neighbour of John's.

"Now, father," Cathleen said, "you must come to our place, too."

He cleared his throat. "I want to see Henrietta."

"Well, but after that!"

He nodded. "Perhaps."

A week or so later—it was now beyond the middle of April—he overheard a conversation between John and Lillian, his wife. It was in the afternoon; and he was lying on his bed. The door of his room was ajar; it had swelled with the dampness of the first spring air; for water stood in pools all over the yard; and windows were left open.

When Lillian, in her sharp, edged voice, said the first few words, John, before answering, tiptoed to his father's little room and looked in.

The old man's eyes were closed; but he saw and understood; for what he had heard, had dispelled all desire for sleep.

"I want to go to the city next week," Lillian had said. "I want to see my sister and get my teeth attended to."

John, returning from the door to the other room, said quietly, "Wait till father's gone."

"Yes," she replied with a rising voice. "That's the way it goes. Either there's no money; or something else comes in between."

"Sh!"

"I don't care. If I wait till seeding begins, it will be left over till fall. And in fall, if there's no crop . . ."

"We'll hope for a crop."

"Hope! Hope!" she said stridently. "I've hoped year after year."

"Sh! And haven't things got better?"

"Better? Worse, you mean."

"You'll wake father!"

"I don't care. What is the idea anyway? Is he going to stay here for good?"

"No, no. He said to Cathleen the other day, he wants to see Hennie."

"Well, let him go, then."

"Now," John said sharply, "listen here and get this. My father's welcome in my house whenever he wishes to come. He's an old man; and I am not going to send him on the road."

"You'd rather chain your wife to the house!"

John, with a gesture of despair, left the room.

John Elliot senior packed his suitcase.

In the evening, when John junior went milking, his father followed him stumping to the barn: the thawed mud had superficially frozen over again, into a tough but yielding crust.

There was nothing of forgetfulness or second childhood about the old man who stood by the rump of the cow.

"Can you take me to town tomorrow?" he asked quietly.

"You better stay a bit longer," John said as to a child.

"No. No. I want to move on. It's time for me to get back to the farm."

"Well," John sighed; for he understood that the old man had heard what his wife had said, "It's too bad, too bad. A man works year in and year out. And when he has a little pleasure for once, it must go that way."

Again they drove most of the way in silence.

The town was in sight when John said, "I am sorry, father. I'd have liked to see you stay."

The old man nodded. After a while he added, "I am going to settle that note of Frank's."

"Don't bother! What's money?"

Again the old man nodded.

"I'll tell you, father," John went on, after a while. "Perhaps you were pretty angry at me when I left the homestead. Of course, you didn't see and couldn't see all sides of the question. There was Lillian. She had a pretty bad time of it before the other girls left. That had given her a dislike for the district. She wanted a change. I've never invited any of the girls. And Norman, of course, he's a fool. The Ormonds dropped in one day, uninvited; and we got to know each other; we've found a way of getting along. But, at the time! Oh, I wanted to get rich quick, in the boom, and all that—and you were right, of course. But I also thought it best to go off all by myself where there would be no relatives about. With new neighbours. I thought it might make things

better at home. My domestic affairs, you understand! What with the wife and myself!"

"Has it done so?" his father asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps not. Less said, I suppose, the better. As for that note of Frank's . . ."

"I'll pay that," his father repeated obstinately.

"Well-l-l," John went on, still drawling and at last trumpeting out his words, "of course, if you want to. It'll be that much off my shoulders. And I'll thank you for your liberality or generosity or whatever I should call it, father." And, quietly again, "The fact remains that I'm sorry you're going. Right sorry I am."

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN ELLIOT SITS AT A DEATH-BED

JOHN ELLIOT arrived at Fisher Landing at five o'clock.

Two boys, sixteen or seventeen years old, were standing near a buggy which was drawn up at the station platform.

The employees of the railroad began at once to unload express shipments from the large van of the train. Half a dozen passengers had alighted.

For a moment nobody seemed to pay any attention to the old man who stood there, hardly able to carry his suitcase.

Then one of the boys spoke to the other and approached.

"Are you Mr. Elliot?" he asked, touching his cap. John Elliot nodded.

"How are you, grandpa?" the boy asked and reached for his valise.

John Elliot followed him.

The boy at the horse's head extended his hand.

"Grant and Allan?" John Elliot asked.

"Yes," came the answer.

The boys, to palliate the awkwardness of the situation, lifted, one the suitcase into the box, the other the lines which were tied to the whip. The old man climbed to his seat.

Grant sat by his side; Allan walked behind as the buggy rolled away from the platform.

For a while the road led straight north and uphill. Then, winding through brush and bush, it turned west.

Within half an hour they drove into the yard which, crowning the hill, overlooked the valley in which the town lay embedded.

At the house, a big, massive woman of forty-five or six stood in the door, imperious, without a smile.

"Hello, father," she said breathlessly, with a voice which had become almost a treble. "And how are you?" She kissed him on the cheek before he alighted.

One of the boys took the suitcase into the house. She turned to the other, "Now, Grant, as soon as you have put the horse in, at once to your home work, do you hear?"

"Sure, mother," the boy replied and, when his grandfather had alighted, he turned and drove to the barn.

"Come in," Henrietta said and led the way through the kitchen, past the dining room, and into the parlour. There she stopped, holding on to the door jamb, and trying to subdue the pounding of her heart.

John Elliot looked at her, blinking.

Henrietta—with the exception of Cathleen the tallest of the family—had, during the last decade, developed into an enormous woman: she stood like a tower; her high bosom did not taper into any waistline. Her head, grey of hair, seemed to sit on her shoulders without the transition of any neck; a triple chin framed its lower part with fleshy folds. Her voice, hoarse and discordant, had the peculiar knack

of changing from a treble into an almost masculine bass.

"Well," she said, "you've been around seeing the whole family, I suppose, father?"

"Yes," he said, beginning to walk up and down while she sank heavily into an arm-chair. "Yes."

She laughed a gurgling laugh. "Are you still as restless as you used to be?"

"I don't know."

"It seems so, from the way you're walking up and down. You remember how you left here ten, twelve years ago, don't you?" She pronounced it "Dont-chou?"—How long ago is it anyway? Why, Juanita was on the way. She's fourteen now."

"Where is she?" Somehow all John Elliot's dimming faculties had gathered to a focus. He was on the point of resenting the way in which his daughter spoke to him. But a memory of the distant past restrained him without defining itself.

"Juanita? She's in the city. There was trouble here in school; and I sent her to college."

"And Pete?"

"I don't know where he is. I hardly ever know."

John Elliot nodded understandingly. Already he felt sorry he had come. He had forgotten all these things. An icy air seemed to descend from the walls of a damp vault.

"How are the Faulknor people? Isabel and Norman? I hear from Gladys once in a while. She is about the only one with whom I correspond. What is Norman's wife like? Gladys writes that she is no good."

Her father looked at her. "Eh?" he made. Then, as if remembering with an effort, "Oh, I don't know."

"Have you seen Cathleen of late?"

"Yes. She came down to John's place."

"Is that so? Is she still putting on airs? At John's, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't understand how John can get along with those people."

Her father cleared his throat. Then he went to the window and looked out.

A door was opened in the house; and a moment later steps ascended the stairway. The boy who had unhitched the horse was going up.

Henrietta, still looking at her father who was turning his back to her, went on, "You have aged." She laughed. "We all have, I suppose. Life's going. How old are you, father?"

"I? I am seventy-four."

"Yes, that would be right. If mother had lived, she'd have been sixty-eight last fall. There were six years between you."

This way of reckoning was the usual one in the family. Everything was referred to the mother.

Outside, a wagon rolled up to the barn.

In the driver, John Elliot recognised Pete. His tall, loose figure was unmistakable.

"There's Pete. I'll go out."

And John Elliot stumped into the hall, donned his coat, and left the house by the backdoor.

"I'll call when supper's ready," Henrietta said after him.

When John Elliot reached the farmyard in front of the barn—where the snow had all melted and the water largely run off—Pete greeted him without stopping in his work. He was loading fence-wire into his wagon. He extended his hand, it is true; but he turned back to his task at once.

"Pretty busy," he said apologetically; "getting ready to do some spring plowing on a hillside I've rented for oats. It's dry there; and if I don't get it done now, I won't get it done before June. I'll have to seed my own place in between. The fence needs repairing, too."

Pete was greatly changed. His tall, wiry body was flattened; he stooped; when he straightened his back, his chest looked cavernous; his face was full of dark hollows, especially about the eyes and mouth. His whimsical features were still smiling; but the smile was bitter and resigned. His speech was broken by a hard, dry cough.

"I've had a cold now for three or four weeks," he said. "Not that it matters. But it bothers me. I don't seem to be able to throw it off."

"Better see to it."

"Who cares?"

When he had finished loading the wire, he went across the yard and took hold of the tongue of a gang-plow; and with an enormous, abandoned effort of his great but wasted body he dragged it across to the wagon.

"I want to throw that in," he said and stood, for a moment, undecided.

Then he turned to the house and opened the kitchen

door. Without entering he said, "I want Grant or Allan."

"What for?" Henrietta's voice was hostile if not indignant.

"I have to take the plow. I can't lift it by myself."

"They can come when their home work is finished."

With a wild, erratic gesture Pete threw the door shut.

"Excuse me a minute," he shouted to his father-in-law who was sitting on a block of wood. And he ran out to the road where he had seen a wagon passing.

A few minutes later he returned with another man, short, thick-set, bearded.

Both threw their sheep-skins, which they were still wearing, on the wood-pile; and together they lifted the plow into the box.

"How about getting it out?" the stranger asked.

"I'll manage that. Thanks, Bill."

"Don't mention it." And the stranger picked up his coat and returned to the road.

Pete, without resuming his coat, went into the barn and brought two or three bags of oats which he pitched into the wagon, in front of the plow.

Then he stood for a moment, lifting the sweaty, clinging shirt from his chest and cooling himself in the slight, chilly spring breeze.

Once more he returned into the stable, working in a great hurry all the time, and led four horses out which he tied behind.

At last, being ready to start, he turned to his father-in-law. "Well," he said, "I may not see you

again. I'm going to stay over there till I'm finished. There's a shack and a stable."

John Elliot rose to his feet. "I am coming with you."

"No, no," Pete laughed. "It's no place for you."

"I am coming with you," the old man repeated obstinately.

For a moment Pete stood. Then he veered on his heel, saying, "Get in, then," and went to the house.

Within two minutes he returned, carrying a bundle of blankets.

John Elliot had climbed in over the wheel and was sitting on one of the bags filled with oats. Pete fetched his coat from the wood-pile and joined him. A moment later he clicked his tongue; and they were off.

As they passed the house, the door of the kitchen opened. Henrietta filled its frame. "Aren't you coming in for supper?" she asked; and it was doubtful to whom the words were addressed.

Pete stopped his team, saying nothing.

"I am going with Pete," her father replied.

"Oh," she said sneeringly. "All right." And the door slammed shut.

Pete drove on. He smiled. He stood loose-jointed, swaying to the jolts of the road.

"You see," he said with a fling of his disengaged hand. "That's what it has come to with us. No use trying to hide it. When you were here before, there was still a let-up once in awhile. There is no let-up now any longer."

"How about the boys?"

"Oh, the boys! They don't dare. You ask them

whether they are glad to go to school. They'll answer, they wish they were not there. What's the use cramming them with algebra and French and such nonsense? They want to do what I want them to do. Farm. But what I say, doesn't count. They are to be engineers and bankers. Examination time's coming. They can't even help me to lift that plow. They must do their home work. Engineers and bankers!" A fit of coughing interrupted the bitter flow of his speech.

They turned down the hill road, towards town. Both were brooding. Then they crossed track and bridge and entered the business part of the town. In front of a large store Pete stopped. A clerk came running out.

Pete bent down. "You bring me . . ." And he gave his order for a number of tinned goods. "And hurry up, Sidney, will you?" he added, coughing.

An excessively small man who was standing on the sidewalk, clad in a grey coat with fringed sleeves, and carrying a striped rag in his breast-pocket by way of a handkerchief, came to the side of the wagon.

"You better be careful with that cough of yours, Pete," he called up to him, showing yellow but sound teeth under a straggling, white moustache. "You should go to bed for a few days before spring work starts."

"That's all right, doc," Pete replied. "No time to lie in bed. Spring work's starting right now."

The sun was sinking. From the west where the dammed-up river flowed through the narrow sluices of the mill-race, the sound of blasting rang across;

the ice had just broken up; huge floes were jammed against the pillars of the dam.

When he received his order of groceries, Pete turned, trotting his horses briskly down Main Street.

Once more he crossed the bridge and turned west.

It was getting dark when, having gone two miles, he entered an open gate to the right. All about, the hills stretched black against the sky.

Inside the fence, the trail led up to a huge frame-house in the shelter of a bluff. This was the Panse place. Mrs. Panse was a widow; Pete had rented part of her farm; the remainder she worked herself with the help of a half-grown boy, her son. A tall, thin, willowy girl in a light-coloured gingham dress came out from the house and called to Pete.

"Dick's filled the cream-can with water, Mr. Harrington. You'll find it at the well."

"All right."

And they went on.

The well was between house and barn. A boy came running and lifted the can till Pete could reach its handle.

"Thanks."

They left the yard and drove over a sloping field for half a mile. Then came another gate which was closed. Pete climbed out.

"There's the shack," he said, pointing.

John Elliot strained his eyes; but he saw nothing but the blackness of a hollow hillside.

It was not till Pete, walking beside his horses, reined them in that the dark outlines of two low buildings became visible to his sight.

"Better stay where you are," Pete said, "till I get a light."

He unhooked the horses, tied up their lines, and dropped their halter-shanks. One by one, as they were released, the six beasts disappeared in the stable which they knew.

Then Pete entered the shack, lighted a lamp, and reappeared with a lantern in his hand.

He helped John Elliot to alight.

"Walk in," he said as if in jest; and he applied himself to the task of unloading.

The shack which consisted of a single room held a small, rusted cook-stove, an old iron bedstead, and some shelves full of pots and pans; nothing else, not even a chair.

"Well," Pete said as he entered, "this is where I hold out till the work on the place is finished. Saves time. Hungry?"

John Elliot started. "Eh? A little."

"In a few minutes we'll have a bite."

It seemed as if, in this retreat of his, Pete were reviving.

He built a fire in the stove, put water on to boil, and heated two tins of baked beans. In the centre of the bed he spread a clean piece of paper to serve as a table-cloth; and on it he placed two grey enamel cups and plates.

"What do you think?" he asked almost gaily. "Still want to stay? Or had I better hitch up and drive you back to the house? I can borrow Mrs. Panse's buggy, you know."

John Elliot chuckled. "I'll stay," he said and

reached for his plate of beans. All this seemed so much like the life he had been leading for years on his own place that he felt as if he had come home.

"There's only one bed."

"We'll sleep together."

They hardly spoke after this; but each felt that the other was company; such sympathetic company as he had wished for. Instinctively they took to each other.

Long before daylight next morning Pete rose and lighted the lamp.

John Elliot was wide awake. He hardly ever slept much at night any longer; besides, he was not used to sharing his bed with another; and Pete had coughed restlessly.

When Pete sat down again, he had to abandon himself to a violent attack of that cough. It was several minutes before he recovered. Then, shivering with the morning cold, he slipped into his clothes and kindled the fire. As soon as it was burning brightly, he went to feed his horses.

John Elliot rose.

"How did you sleep?"

"Not much. It doesn't matter."

Pete made breakfast; he drank his coffee scalding-hot. "Ah!" he said and pounded his chest. "That feels good!"

Day dawned; and Pete went to harness his horses.

John Elliot followed and looked on.

Once more Pete turned to him. "Won't it be tedious? I am going to plow."

The old man shook his head. "Go ahead. Go ahead."

Another attack of his cough detained Pete. He had to bend over and to support himself by putting his hands on his knees. Then something seemed to loosen in his tortured chest. North of the shack, where the bush projected from the west, lay the remnant of a snow-drift. Pete went over and spat out, on the snow, what he had coughed up.

"Look at that!" he said with a note of disgust.

The phlegm was rusty-brown.

Pete wiped his mouth and returned to the plow.

"Get up!"

All morning John Elliot walked about, now from the shack to the field where Pete plowed, now along the fence to a point whence the town and, north of it, Pete's house could be seen. The field, drained by its slope, was dry.

About an hour or so before dinner time Henrietta came driving in a buggy.

"Now listen," she said to her father who met her at the gate, "you come home with me, father."

The commanding tone antagonised him. "No," he said.

She lost her temper. "Father, don't be silly!"

He glared at her.

"I don't care about Pete," she went on. "He can do as he pleases. I'm used to that. But I don't want it said that I leave my father here on this place without looking after him."

"I," he said with that obstinacy which was grow-

ing on him, "I like it here. I don't want to come."

"Oh, very well," Henrietta replied haughtily. "I've done what I could. Get up there, Prince." And, her face pale with anger, she left across the field.

When Pete came in for dinner, John Elliot did not say a word about her call. He felt like a boy playing truant. Once or twice he chuckled to himself.

The afternoon passed in the same, monotonous way.

But about five o'clock the buggy returned, driven by one of the boys. John Elliot was lying down in the shack.

"That's for you, grandpa," the boy said when he entered, carrying a basket. For a moment he looked about, an embarrassed grin on his face. "Anything I can do for you?"

"No." His grandfather sat up. A sudden thought flashed through his mind. "Come here."

The boy approached. He was almost as tall as his father and looked strikingly like him.

"Are you glad you can go to school?" the old man asked with a look of cunning.

The boy scratched his head. "Not very," he said.

"What grade are you in?"

"Grade nine."

"Are you going to pass?"

"Don't know. I don't think so."

"That's all," his grandfather said with a sudden gesture of dismissal.

The boy lingered awkwardly. "Well, I better get home. Good-by."

John Elliot examined the basket. It contained a roasted chicken with creamed potatoes, a jar of preserved peaches, and a plate of sliced bread.

He covered it up neatly again and went out to the field.

When Pete came down his furrow and drew his horses in, John Elliot said, "Come to the shack. Your wife has sent some supper."

"You eat that. It is for you."

"No. It's too much."

Pete hesitated, glanced at the sun and the field, and yielded. He looked still more cavernous than the day before. He looked caved-in.

They went to the shack; and Pete unhitched. His cough was almost continuous now.

They had supper; and although it was still broad daylight, Pete went to bed.

John Elliot was worried; but he did not know what worried him. He had reached the point—owing to his rapid aging since he had left the scene of his life-long labours—where he ceased to take any interest in the affairs of others. Yet Pete was ill. That much even he could see. His illness was apt to interfere with his own quiet enjoyment of the peace which this hermitage in the hills afforded.

Whenever Pete was not coughing, he dozed. But when he coughed, he threw up a frothy, evil-looking phlegm, rusty-brown; and he pressed his sides with pain, sometimes groaning, sometimes yelling. Hours went by.

John Elliot sat on the edge of the bed till it grew dark. Then he lighted a lamp and walked up and

down. The thought of going to bed did not occur to him. His worry was not so much made up of anxiety as of irritation. Again hours went by.

Pete beckoned to him.

He went to the bed and sat down.

Pete's speech was broken; but he managed to convey his meaning. "Go to the house at which we stopped when we came last night. Wake them up. Get Dick, the boy, to go to town and to tell Dr. Weatherhead that I'm ill. Dr. Weatherhead. It's the old trouble. That's all he needs to say."

John Elliot took the lantern and started out. It was only half a mile to the house; but by the feeble light of the lantern in which ruts and clods cast huge, ill-defined shadows, constantly moving, it was hard to distinguish the trail from the field; and not till he fastened his eyes on the distance where the buildings of the farmstead were dimly outlined against the stars, did he succeed in holding to his direction. It was an hour before he reached the yard.

Arrived there, he went to the house and knocked till there was a response. Upstairs, a window was opened, and the voice of the girl enquired who was there.

"Pete's sick," John Elliot said. "He wants Dick to go to town and to get Dr. Weatherhead. It's the old trouble, he says."

"What!" the girl's voice exclaimed. "Pneumonia? I'll call Dick. He'll be down directly."

John Elliot sat on the stoop and waited.

Five minutes later Dick Panse burst through the

door, nearly falling over the old man who was holding the lantern between his knees.

"Scuse me!" he said. "Come on. Bring the light."

And he led the way to the stable.

While the boy harnessed the horse, he asked questions. "Dr. Weatherhead, you say? Sure he didn't mean Dr. Stanhope? The old trouble? That means pneumonia, I guess. I'm to bring him out, ain't I?"

At last, jumping into the buggy, he clicked his tongue. With a wild toss of its head the horse bounded away into the night.

John Elliot stood for a moment. Then, half dressed and curiously haggard, a female figure came running over the dark desolation of the yard.

"What a terrible thing!" she said when she reached the old man. "The third time! They say, nobody recovers from a third attack of pneumonia. He's had a bad cold for weeks. I've noticed it. But he doesn't take care of himself. He never did. Mary's dressing. She'll go with you. You're his father-in-law, are you not?"

John Elliot felt dazed; he was almost flattered, as if he had risen into an unexpected dignity.

A few minutes later, Mary Panse, the girl, joined the two at the barn.

She took charge. "There's nobody with him, is there? Come on, we must hurry."

At the shack, Pete was tossing about on his bed, groaning and holding his aching sides. Being in a sweat, he had uncovered himself.

Mary Panse removed some of his blankets and covered him carefully with the rest. A nursing in-

instinct prompted her to wipe the sick man's face with a damp cloth and to offer him water.

John Elliot walked about with his stumping gait. Pete's face, by the light of the lamp which stood on the shelf above, looked like a death's-head.

It was past three in the morning when the doctor arrived. It was the same, small, shabby old man who had been standing in front of the store in town. He looked frightened. Pete nodded to him in unsmiling recognition. He showed him the handkerchief filled with sputum.

The little man looked a puny ally in a fight with death. With shaking hands he applied the stethoscope. It was a mere matter of form. In his heart he knew that the man was doomed and that his own services were almost a mockery. Yet he must do what was expected of him. Besides, a fee was involved; and a fee meant much.

He spent twenty minutes on the examination. Then, with a stertorous sigh, he turned and looked at John Elliot.

"You are his father-in-law?" he shouted with his senile voice; for he was half deaf.

"Yes. Yes." But this time the old doctor seemed, by his mere question, to hold him responsible; and he, too, felt frightened.

"Well," the doctor went on, still shouting and folding his glasses, "pneumonia, you know." And he looked up, obliquely, from where he sat on the edge of the bed, humping his shoulders and smiling.

Look and gesture implied that the inferences were obvious.

"I'll leave some medicine. A tablespoon in water once an hour. You know, of course, the cough is his only salvation. When he stops coughing, he's gone. It's a question of nursing. I'll drop in at Mrs. Harrington's and tell her. Nothing to be done till morning. Then we'll have to move him to the house."

Pete raised a hand and shook a lean, grimy finger.

The old doctor cackled. "No," he shouted, bending over the sick man. "You've nothing to say in the matter. I hold your life in my hands. I'm not going to take the responsibility of leaving you here."

"What's the use!" Pete gasped. But a paroxysm of coughing stopped his speech.

"That may be," the doctor shouted. "That may be. But we must try what we can."

He rose and placed a bottle on the cold stove. Doubtful whom to address, he looked from the girl to John Elliot and to the girl again, repeating his directions. "I'll be back at daylight," he added.

When he went out, John Elliot followed him.

Dick Panse was still sitting in the buggy, waiting.

With teeth chattering in the morning chill, the old doctor turned to John Elliot and shouted—which was quite unnecessary, for he spoke close to his ear, "A pity! A pity! That man wants to die. He doesn't want to be cured!" And without changing the volume of his voice, he changed its quality to that of a whisper. "You might call it a case of suicide. Others will call it a case of murder!"

With an exaggerated, almost clownish gesture he pointed two, three times into the hills as if, with an extended finger, he wished to puncture the air. Then,

without awaiting a question or answer, he climbed to the seat of the buggy by the side of the boy.

The buggy disappeared into the night.

Far in the east, beyond the shoulder of the hill, the first dim greying of the dawn shivered over the sky.

John Elliot turned into the shack.

When the sun topped the hill, two cars announced their approach by the hum of their engines.

John Elliot went out and opened the gate.

The first car, with its top down, was driven by the man who had helped Pete to lift his plow into the wagon. Across the back seat lay a stretcher with plenty of bedding. The doctor sat by the driver's side.

In the second car Henrietta came with another man.

The doctor and Henrietta alighted and entered the shack.

Henrietta, wrapped in herself, glanced about and stopped at the bed. The sick man was delirious and paid no attention.

The doctor opened the door and called.

Then, under his shouted directions, the sick man was transferred to the stretcher and carried out. Henrietta and John Elliot stood by without so much as stirring.

When they all sat again in the cars, John Elliot having entered that of his daughter, Henrietta held the door for a moment as if inviting Mary Panse to accept the ride as far as her house.

Mary Panse, tall, bony, plain of face and awkward

of movement, declined with a shrug of her shoulders, open-mouthed.

The door slammed shut; and the little procession got under way, with the improvised ambulance leading. The doctor was squatting on its front seat and steadied the stretcher with his hand.

When they crossed the Panse yard, Mrs. Panse, tall and thin like her daughter, her arms wrapped in her apron, stood on the stoop with Dick, her son, looking on with that look with which we follow a funeral. The first rays of the sun struck into the hollow between the hills.

When they emerged on the road, the second car shot past the other which went very slowly in order to lessen the jolts.

In the house on the hill, a few last preparations were made. A bedstead had already been placed in the parlour.

When the sick man had been transferred to that bed, the cars departed. The doctor stayed.

Half an hour later Henrietta called the two old men into the dining room for breakfast.

The doctor, with his loud voice, tried to say a word of comfort, for form's sake, "Too bad! Too bad!"

John Elliot sat silent.

After breakfast the doctor rose. "Well, I'll go outside for a smoke."

John Elliot followed him. The doctor sat down on the lounge which had temporarily been placed on the porch; and, seeing John Elliot, he moved over as if inviting him to sit by his side. John Elliot accepted.

"That's right," said the doctor, puffing at his pipe;

and, nudging his neighbour, "Not a bad place for those who won't see fifty again, eh?" And, as if he had made the wittiest jest, he crowed with laughter. Then he ceased. "You are not as old as I am," he said. "How old are you?"

"Seventy-four."

"Ah-ah!" The doctor pushed him with his elbow. "A mere kid! A mere kid!" And again he cackled and crowed. "I'm seventy-eight!" he added and laughed and laughed.

Five days went by. Most of the time the doctor stayed on the hill. Alternately he and John Elliot kept watch at the bedside; they met only now and then on the porch or in the dining room where they took turns in sleeping on the lounge.

Occasionally Henrietta sat down in the sick-room. But her presence seemed to irritate the patient. The boys were kept out of sight.

Mr. Barrett, the neighbour who had helped Pete with his plow, looked after the stock. Not a person called.

Most of the time Pete was delirious. Once, when he was not, the doctor suggested engaging a nurse. Pete declined angrily. But when Doctor Weatherhead spoke of calling in a second doctor for a consultation, he consented with a nod of his head. Accordingly, on the fourth day, a doctor from Brandon was telephoned for. He came in the evening; but he did not think it necessary to make even an examination. When he emerged from the parlour, he met Henrietta and John Elliot in the hall and shrugged his

shoulders, raising his hands in a significant gesture.

All that night John Elliot sat up by the sick man's bed. When he had risen to go, Pete had detained him by a motion of his fingers.

The full significance of what was happening had, so far, not become clear to John Elliot. He had felt bewildered, full of strange, only half defined forebodings and doubts. He saw only a sick man tortured by pain. Several times, it is true, the thought of death had occurred to him; but like a thought devoid of meaning.

Towards ten o'clock that night the stertorous and laboured breathing of the patient gave way to what looked like a collapse. His eyes turned inward. He was neither delirious nor asleep. He lay, staring straight ahead of him, as if he were seeing, not the room in which he was, but a different world, invisible to all eyes but his: a world either infinitely far away or superimposed on, shoved into that world of ours which we call the world of reality. In those dull, lustreless eyes of his strange points of light seemed to flicker. His lips were parched. Once or twice he tried to moisten them, moving his tongue as if it were an enormous labour next to impossible to perform.

John Elliot reached for the glass of water which stood on a chair and, kneeling down by the bed, he lifted the sick man's head. But when, for the fraction of a second, the dying man focused his eyes on the tumbler and, with evident distaste, shook his head, with the slightest attempt at a motion; and when the eyes, at once, lost their focus again, looking once

more as into some great distance or into a world subject to different laws of optics from our own, the full significance of the hour came home to the old man who was watching by the bedside.

The man was leaving this world and had already half entered another!

He was standing on the threshold of whatever follows. Time and space and all other fallacies of life had ceased to exist for him.

John Elliot's thought, clear and orderly, frightened though he was, saw with extraordinary distinctness that this man was preceding him as another might precede him into a dark and mysterious room never entered before. A strange curiosity to spy upon him took hold of the white-bearded man. Already the doors of that room stood ajar; they kept opening, slowly, irrevocably: it was those doors that the other man saw.

John Elliot stood by the bedside, looking down on the dying man. What if he could waken him by a touch? Would he turn back into life? He would not.

For fully an hour John Elliot never stirred, almost holding his breath. He stared at the man who lay motionless as if, by some transference of mental vision, he himself might be able to steal a look into that beyond, whatever it might be, into which the other was preceding him. For he had the clear conviction, amounting to a certainty, that his own hour was close at hand and that he would himself soon follow and pass through that door into the other mysterious world.

In a flash; too, his thought seemed to take a bird's-eye view of his life that was past: of his youth; of his marriage; of the years during which he and his wife had brought up their children; of his own attempts at guiding them; of his failure to do so; of his anger and anguish at his lack of success. And in the same flash of thought he seemed to strip himself of all these things as if they did not matter. What solely mattered, was this: to be ready for the next world, to be prepared!

That was the reason, too, why, when he sat down at last, he did not call Henrietta; for, knowing that the end was near, she had not gone upstairs but prepared a bed for herself on the lounge in the dining room.

There he sat, staring, from the outside of that door still closed to him, but open to the man who lay on the bed.

On the other side of that door, whether as persons or not, were his wife and his own father and mother; and their parents; and all those ancestors of his of whose blood he had in his veins and whose blood he had, in varying proportions, transmitted to his children. And there, too, was what would perhaps explain the unexplained and inexplicable mysteries of this seemingly senseless life into which we drift like birds of passage passing over some strange land.

This was the third last of the great emotions of his life; and it overwhelmed him. Never again would anger have power to move his heart.

At four or five in the morning a slight noise made

him turn. Huge and towering, Henrietta stood in the door, clad in a dressing gown.

"What?" she asked, startled and breathless, "is he dead?"

But the dying man whose face had looked like a mask, with his eyes closed, opened his dry, sticky lips and, with startling clearness, whispered two words.

"Not yet."

Though there could have been no such intention, the intonation was that of irony.

Henrietta broke down.

John Elliot rose. But once more his look was riveted on that face. It seemed to twitch. The waxen fingers on the counterpane seemed to make little, waving motions.

And suddenly, with a gasp, the jaw fell and the eyes slipped open. Death had come.

John Elliot went upstairs, seeking for a place where he might lie down. Having found a bed, he lay and dozed; he rested and listened. There were comings and goings in the house. But they were no concern of his. Let the living look after the things of life: he had died to the world.

Yet, when he descended the stairs, about noon, he entered the parlour and looked about.

The room was upset. The bed had been taken apart; its ends were standing against the wall; the mattress had been removed. Where was the corpse?

On a stretcher, closely wrapped in a sheet, lay a long, cylindrical body.

John Elliot, wondering, idled along its whole length. And when he came to the end, he saw, with a start that almost made his heart stand still, two booted feet sticking out into the air. Above the upper edge of the boots, the thin legs were bare.

Precipitately he left the room and went out on the porch. There, two men were busy with an enormous rectangular box of black-painted wood. They looked up and nodded to him.

He went past and around the house, to the lawn enclosed by bare shrubs. On that lawn, the two boys, Grant and Allan, were playing ball!

He turned, crossed the porch once more, went through the hall into the dining room, and sat down on the lounge. In the kitchen beyond, Henrietta was working over the stove.

When the two men and the boys were called in for dinner, John Elliot took the seat assigned to him and ate. Several times a whispered word was addressed to him; but he did not reply; he was not aware that he had been spoken to.

Then he went upstairs again and lay down on the first bed he found.

Next day relatives began to arrive: Pete's father and mother, stone-old; a sister of his; and, in the afternoon, John, Cathleen, and Juanita, the dead man's daughter.

For John Elliot, this day as well as the one which followed passed as in a dream. He felt pushed about. He was only dimly aware of the fact that John and

Cathleen had taken charge of him and that he had been removed to the hotel across the river.

Came the funeral to which, with Cathleen, John, and Margaret, he drove in a car.

Margaret had arrived in the morning. She was a stranger to him. He was told that she, too, was a university instructor now; but he failed to grasp the meaning of it and merely shook his head.

"Where's your husband?" he asked.

She and Cathleen exchanged a look. "I am still single, father," she replied in a rich contralto. "I intend to remain so."

He was in the house on the hill.

Hundreds of people were there. Fifty or more were crowded into hall, dining room, parlour, kitchen, and stairway. The rest of the multitude overflowed porch and lawn, down to where the cars were parked in a seemingly endless row.

Cathleen took his arm and led him into the parlour where a seat was reserved for him as well as for all the relatives of the dead man and his wife. With blinking eyes he glanced from one to the other.

At the end of the line of sitting figures sat Henrietta, tall, towering, serious, but tearless. Next to her, old Mr. and Mrs. Harrington, sobbing. And many others.

Obediently he followed Cathleen's lead. But when he reached his chair and turned, he caught sight of the coffin and of the thin, pinched face which was propped up on its cushion.

Instantly he checked himself in the motion of sitting down and, regardless of the mute protest of his daughter, went out again.

There, in the densely packed crowd, he squeezed his way restlessly about, hearing, without comprehending, the various remarks of those who had come to show the dead man the last honour.

"Now, there's a fool woman if ever there was one! —That's her father."—"Pete was a worker. Never rested from dawn till dark! Worked all winter."—"I shouldn't wonder if she realised one day what she's lost."

Soon after, he caught the sound of a voice. It was that of the Anglican minister in charge who gave out the first hymn.

All through the singing he kept moving about, stepping on people's feet and pushing them aside.

As it happened, he was near the door when, the hymn ended, the minister's sonorous voice rang out inside.

"Let us pray!"

He stopped and listened. And he continued to listen for a while when the funeral sermon began. Both prayer and sermon were of the ordinary kind, the routine utterance of the man to whom death has become a commonplace.

But on John Elliot they made a powerful impression; and that impression was almost the reverse of that received during the last few hours at the bedside of the dying man. There he had seemed to see the other world and all that was ahead of him: he had viewed life and eternity from the point of view of him

who was leaving the one and entering the other. He had not only not dreaded death; he had almost wished for it and welcomed its approach.

Now he seemed to see things from the point of view of those who were left behind.

"Why should they sorrow?" the minister exclaimed.

Why should they sorrow? The minister meant to imply that sorrow was futile. But to John Elliot the question was a call to grieve which could not be denied.

Why, indeed, should they sorrow?

Because this man who lay there, stark and dead, had passed from among them. Because never again, once the lid of the coffin was closed, would they see his good, honest face, his smiling lips, and the knowing irony in his eyes. Because, above all, if they had ever wronged him—as who had not?—by the merest trifle, by a cross word, an angry look, a contemptuous gesture—they could never, till they themselves lay low, make up for such wrong! And how much more than any other she who had lived with him as his wedded wife for eighteen years and had—by her temper, her inability to enter into another's views, and her self-seeking—driven him at last to the point where he was glad to die: where he chose death in preference to this, the homely world of earthly contact and affection! She, his, John Elliot's daughter!

All these things did not pass through his mind in articulate form: they were adumbrated only in a feeling of wild despair and vicarious remorse and repentance.

Everybody who happened to stand near the door knew who this white-haired, white-bearded man was;

and as he moved, they quietly made room for him.

With one hand he grasped the door jamb, bending over and leaning his snow-white head against the post. With the other, he covered his eyes.

His body swayed and shook with sobs; and the tears ran down, trickling into his beard and falling on the threshold till they wetted it.

The whole house seemed at last to vibrate with the rhythm of his weeping; and even the minister heard it and listened to it above the sound of his own, melodious voice.

Inside, in the parlour, facing the corpse in its coffin, Henrietta frowned, struck with a sudden realization of what might perhaps be ahead of her. Cathleen and Margaret sat pale and shaken. John's jaw quivered. The two boys, sons of the dead man, looked disconcertedly serious. And the girl, the only one of her family who had really loved her father, sank into herself and cried in unison with the man at the door.

Nobody listened to the words of the sermon; nobody listened to anything but the sobs and the crying outside. These sobs and that weeping were a more powerful and convincing sermon than any words of a mere stranger could be.

Nevertheless, everybody present sat till the minister's speech was finished and a last hymn sung.

Then, one by one, they filed past the coffin to have a last look at that shell that had been a man.

And, as they issued from the house, Cathleen and Margaret came and took their father's arm to lead him away.

CHAPTER XV

JOHN ELLIOT PASSES FROM HAND TO HAND

HENCEFORTH John Elliot was under the tutelage of his children.

Before they left Fisher Landing, Cathleen, Margaret, and John talked matters over. Cathleen was to be the first to take him with her.

With that day a curious existence began for the old man. His infirmities were rapidly growing upon him. His memory failed; his hearing, to all appearances, grew to be such that he had to be shouted to; his eyesight became very dim; he lost track of the passage of time.

Unexpectedly, in all sorts of positions, he would go to sleep; and when he awoke, he did not know where he was. Yes, occasionally he would obstinately, persistently act and speak as if the time were not the present but the past. He would address Cathleen as if she were Martha, his wife; and Woodrow—who was rarely visible at his house, for he filled all sorts of political positions—as if he were John or Arthur, a boy of no more than fourteen or fifteen years.

And yet, there were one or two points of actual fact which he would come back to with astonishing lucidity; and one of them was the necessity of providing for the disposition of his property.

At last Woodrow took him to see a lawyer who

was a friend of his. And the directions which he gave to the man of law were such that they filled every one with admiration. He had compiled a complete list of all payments made by him at any time to any one of his children or sons-in-law; and also a list of his possessions. He directed that this liquid property of his was to be divided into nine parts, so that, if all previous payments were added to each share, the totals were equal. For himself he reserved a pension of fifty dollars a month for life. The principal sums distributed as gifts *inter vivos* were to be handled by a trust company while he lived. The interest, less his own pension, was to be paid to the recipients of these gifts in quarterly instalments. The farm was to be sold within thirty days of his death, with all it contained; and the proceeds were to be a fund administered by the municipality of Prairie Hills, the interest to be used to supply seed-grain to such farmers within that municipality as were deprived of their crops by drought or hail.

"I want a copy of these dispositions sent to all my children," he concluded; "and they are formally to assent to them and to waive all protest now or after my death before they touch a cent."

Within three weeks' time this matter was settled. Each of the children received close to seven thousand dollars.

Meanwhile, a new phase had defined itself in his waning life.

The Ormonds, in their large and sumptuous home, had assigned to him a suite of two rooms which were more or less secluded from the rest of the house. See-

ing that he disliked their way of living, he was largely left alone there, though his daughter Cathleen and, sometimes, Margaret sat with him for hours at a stretch. As summer came, he would go out by himself and putter about on the grounds, pulling weeds and trimming shrubs; or simply stumping up and down over the lawns.

When, as occasionally happened, he entered the general living rooms of the house, he was first made much of; but, as everybody became used to his presence, less and less attention was paid to him; till at last he was treated like a child that is presumed not to understand what grown-up people talk about among themselves.

But often he both understood and paid attention.

Since, at the same time, his sense of responsibility and, as it were, connection with those who surrounded him seemed to disappear, he soon found himself in a curious position which sometimes angered but mostly delighted him. This position was that of a masked or invisible spectator and listener who laughed or frowned at what he heard or saw. Those who spoke and acted in his presence as if he did not exist or were incapable of judging what they said or did were, of course, entirely unaware of the interest which he occasionally took in all proceedings.

The reason for this attitude of others towards him lay in his apparently increasing deafness and blindness. They did not know that these infirmities were not nearly so real as they presumed.

At most times he was greatly preoccupied; for as a rule he lived with the phantoms of the past. He spoke

to his wife, silently, hardly moving his lips; or he gave instructions and advice to John, at the time when John first began to farm for himself; or he pleaded with Gladys and Mary, defending himself against imaginary reproaches which they addressed to him because he had not prevented them from making a mistake in the choice of their husbands.

When, at such times, somebody suddenly spoke to him, out of that world which to others was the real world but which to him was much less real and important than the world of his phantoms, he found it very hard to extricate himself from the latter and to focus his attention on the former. Consequently, he would ask two, three times to have things repeated to him. He heard perfectly well what was being said; but he did not grasp its meaning because visionary voices were speaking at the same time or because he still hesitated between lending ear physically or mentally.

In other words, his deafness was not so much deafness as lack of attention.

His speech, for the same reason, became still more abrupt; and at times it would even become slurred. "Eh?" he would ask irately; or "Par-me?" meaning "Pardon me."

People who knew this weakness of his got into the habit of shouting at him. "Don't shout!" he would say. The person speaking would perhaps repeat softly what he had said. Then, involuntarily, in response to the puzzled, intense frown on his brow, he would shout again.

Sometimes, indeed, the old man would completely

confound the real person speaking with the one whom he had summoned from the past.

"Father," Cathleen asked him one day, "we are going to the locks. Would you like to come along in the car?"

He nodded. "Yes. I'll hitch Dolly up; or we can take John's bronchos."

Thus the conviction took root that he was getting dull; that his mind was inactive; that his life was barely more than a vegetating existence.

But occasionally the life of his phantoms was dormant; and whenever that was the case, he understood what was going on about him with a strange, almost hyper-resonant clearness; as if all that was spoken were spoken inside of a hollow vault where it resounded with a supernatural power of percussion.

On such occasions he, feeling that the conversation went on without any reference to him, had the at first uncanny impression as if he had returned into this world from some strange beyond and were invisibly present.

Then, mastering his emotions as he got used to this new state of things, he began to enjoy it, laughing to himself and feeling as if he were eavesdropping like some Puck or airy spirit and listening to mortal foolishness and lack of sense. He was even tempted to throw in a word now and then, to show that he heard and understood; as if he were playing with children. Once or twice he gave in to this temptation and suddenly said, "I see you!" and smiled.

To those who turned astonished eyes upon him,

that smile looked strangely inane; and whereas they never doubted his perfect sanity when he was living with his phantoms, ascribing his demands for repetition to a mere physical defect, they concluded that now, when in reality he was paying strict attention to what was going on in the world of time and space, he was transplanted to some dim past when his children were infants.

He noticed that misunderstanding and interpreted it in his own way. "They think I am crazy," he said to himself. "It's they that are crazy!" For their worries and preoccupations seemed to him perfectly irrelevant.

He thought a great deal about this; and he came to the conclusion that indeed he had grown to be vastly wiser than they. Why in the world should they worry about such things as the outcome of certain elections? They had enough to eat and to spare; let them use their leisure to order their lives and to find a meaning in them as he had done.

Gradually, John Elliot even developed a new power: that of storing away memories of things to which, at the moment, he paid no attention whatever. Later, in his moments of direct reaction to the workaday world, he remembered and judged things aptly and correctly.

This whole workaday world, however, became distasteful to him; and, as the season advanced, he became more and more impatient at its intrusions. He found a place in the yard—the park, they called it—where a hammock was slung between two old elms.

More and more frequently he would go and lie in that hammock; and in a state between sleeping and waking he would live there in his past, throughout the years on the farm at Sedgeby; or, still farther back in time, in the house of his parents, east of Arkwright.

Occasionally, perhaps between calls, his daughter came to him, there; and, seeing that his eyes were open, she would speak to him.

"Well, father," she said perhaps, "this is a beautiful day, is it not?"

And he would rise and mutter, as if in a hurry, "Yes, it is high time that I feed the horses"; or, speaking worriedly, "Martha, aren't the girls in yet?"

And when he, then, went to the house and reawoke to the reality, he would shake his head and grumblingly go to his room and lock himself in.

May, June, and July went by. One night, towards the end of the latter month, John Elliot had gone to bed. But, being restless and, as is common in old age, feeling no need of sleep, he rose again, dressed, and went downstairs. As it happened, this was one of his lucid hours: all the phantoms had gone to their graves.

At the house there had been a reception that night. But it was past twelve o'clock; and the guests had gone. Only in the drawing room there was still light. He crossed the hall and entered.

Cathleen and Woodrow were sitting together. All the lights but one had been turned off. As he entered, Cathleen and Woodrow looked up and smiled at him. But he, in his usual way, frowned and went to a cor-

ner where he sat down in a huge, soft arm-chair.

The two younger people were silent for a minute or so.

Then Cathleen spoke, lowering her voice, "We shall have to come to some decision at once. Father won't hear us. You say you have five weeks at the most?"

"Yes," Woodrow answered. "And, on the principle of combining pleasure with business, I should like to go in the car and take you and Margaret along. As for your father . . ."

"Oh," Cathleen said, catching his look, "it is not to be thought of. Well, let us go to bed. We must postpone the decision till we hear from Saskatchewan or John."

She rose and turned to her father with a smile, speaking in that loud voice in which everybody addressed him, "Father!"

"Eh?"—this from habit.

"It's past midnight. I suppose we'll all turn in?"

"Yes," he said and nodded. And he rose briskly, she taking his arm.

Woodrow waited till they had reached the door and then switched the very last light off.

John Elliot did not go to sleep that night. He lay down without undressing.

He had clearly heard and understood every word. He had suddenly—with a poignancy which was painful—realised his situation. He was an old, infirm man, of no earthly use. He was in the way. And yet he could not be left alone. That was the worst.

They were waiting for word from Saskatchewan or John! From Saskatchewan! That meant from Gladys or Isabel. To neither of these places did he want to go. But how was he to manage?

No doubt they were all waiting for his death!

Death! And he focused his mental eye on that possibility, nay, certainty. It was the first time he had done so since he had seen Pete Harrington die.

Afraid? No. There was a door, black and mysterious. What was behind? A forking of the paths. Which path would be his? Had he done what he must do? Was there anything left to be done? No, nothing. It did not matter how he died. What mattered was how he had lived. How had he lived?

With one thing in view: to multiply the seed of his life. That he had done. He had raised his children. Not, it is true, entirely as he would have liked to do: they had slipped away from his control. But it could not be helped perhaps. He had pointed the path for them; whether they would go it or not, that decision rested with them. His work was done. There was nothing left but to die. Death would be welcome.

Yet, even for death he must wait the call.

His eyes were dimmed with tears as he lay there, half conscious only, at last.

But, as morning came and, owing to the powerful way in which his faculties had been focused upon reality, his preoccupation with actual things persisted, he rose with the early dawn of summer and packed his suitcase. He hoped they would let him depart alone.

That done, he walked up and down till it was half past six. Then he rang his bell. He had to ring three, four times before there was a response.

At last a man servant, half dressed, came and knocked.

He opened his door. "I want to see my daughter," he said and slammed the door.

Cathleen came, a worried look on her face.

"I am going," he said and pointed to his suitcase. "The train leaves at half past eight."

Cathleen, not wishing to irritate him, hesitated a moment. "I'll see to it that breakfast is ready in time." And, smiling at him, she left him to consult with her husband.

"Listen here, father," Woodrow said at the breakfast table.

"Don't shout!"

"Well, the fact is, we were planning an extended trip, travelling in the car. You wish to go to Saskatchewan. It would hardly be out of our way—not more than a day's run—for us to put you down at Gladys' place, or at Isabel's—wherever you wish. We should not like to let you travel alone.' Or, if you can't wait till next week, wait a day or so; and Cathleen can go with you by train. I shall pick her up as soon as I am free."

The old man looked sternly ahead. There was a moment's silence. He did not want to be accompanied; but he knew he could not get away by himself. He wanted to go home, to his own place in the hills; but he did not care to betray the fact. So, in a voice not to be contradicted, and shooting sharp

looks to both sides, he merely said, "I am going to-day."

Cathleen and Woodrow exchanged a glance; and Cathleen rose.

Twenty minutes later, when her father was impatiently stumping up and down through the hall, Woodrow went to get the car, delaying intentionally till Cathleen came down the stairs in her travelling costume.

Her father uttered no protest when, at the station, after he had bought his ticket to Regina, she purchased a second one and entered the day-coach with him.

In the evening of the following day they arrived at Faulknor. Cathleen arranged for a car to take them to Gladys' place.

They were greeted with wordless surprise. Gladys came out on the stoop and stared at them. Then, unsmiling, she descended the steps to kiss her father and her sister.

"Well," she said almost grimly, "since you are here, come in."

Cathleen handed her her own small bag and deposited her father's valise on the ground before she paid the driver.

A tall, slim youth appeared at the corner of the house; and Cathleen, busy with her purse, smiled at him.

"You are Charlie, are you? Please take that suitcase in."

Gladys had already preceded him with her father.

When the car turned and Cathleen approached the

steps, Gladys came out again and, with a motion of her brows, summoned her to follow.

She led the way to where, on the west side of the house, a pile of new lumber was stacked.

"Yes," she said, answering Cathleen's glance. "We are going to fix the house up. Add a room, and board and plaster the rest. We made an arrangement to pay for the lumber in instalments out of the money we get from father." She stopped with a sigh. "Well, Cathleen, you know yourself how it is. I cannot take him. He is my father and all that. But I have only two rooms."

"Can you take me?"

"Sure," Gladys said. "You can sleep with me. And Frank and Charlie can double up. Do you know that Henrietta is here?"

"Hennie?"

"Yes. She came a week ago. Her boys are working out. It seems they have started cutting in Manitoba. She expects to be over to-night. She is at Norman's."

Cathleen stood lost in thought. "You know," she said at last, "my husband and I are planning to go to California next week. He is going to pick me up. We shall go by Alberta. He has business there. But that is not the reason why I bring father. He took it into his head yesterday that he wanted to leave. We tried to persuade him to wait till we all went, so that we could notify you. But he would not listen to us."

Gladys nodded, pressing her lips together. "You see! You see!"

"Well, he can't be left alone."

"Of course not," Gladys agreed. "But there are homes for old people!"

Cathleen stared at her with wide eyes.

"Does it sound cruel? Well, life makes you cruel. Frank and he would never get along. He let me marry Frank! But ever since . . ."

"When can you take us over to Isabel's?"

"Right away," Gladys said. "Charlie! Ah, there you are. Charlie, hitch the horse to the buggy. Your aunt wants to take grandpa over to aunt Isabel's, right away."

The old man had not spoken a word. But, when the buggy stood in front of the door and Cathleen came and took his arm, saying, "Come, father," he rose obediently and allowed himself to be led.

At Isabel's, where they arrived after dark, the surprise was no less great though it was shown less openly.

"Why, sure," Isabel exclaimed, "I can put father up. You are going to stay for a while, aren't you, father? Now I'll tell you. We'll put you upstairs for the night. Where you've slept once before. But to-morrow we'll arrange things differently. You'll have a room downstairs, all by yourself." And, turning to Cathleen, she added in a lower tone, "You know, don't you, that old Mrs. Harvey died a month ago? We wrote John about it."

"No," Cathleen said. "I didn't know. How old was she?"

"Eighty-three. Did you say you are going back to Gladys'?"

Half an hour later Cathleen entered Gladys' house, alone.

"Well," she asked, "is Henrietta here?"

"No," Gladys replied. "Norman passed in his car. I stopped him and told him to keep Henrietta there for the night. His wife's away at her mother's. So he has the room."

"Norman's wife still the same?"

Gladys raised shoulders and eyebrows.

An hour or so went by. Frank came home, smiling, apologetic, saying little, eclipsing himself. Was he afraid of embarrassing revelations? He sat down to a lonely supper.

Next day, the first, almost indignant surprise having worn off, Gladys felt somewhat badly about the reception she had given her old father. Shame-facedly she laughed about it while she and her sister had breakfast.

"You know," she repeated, "how it is. Look at that!" And she pointed to the bare, lathed walls.

"You didn't spend a winter here?"

"We did so," Gladys said emphatically. "That is, not the whole of it. We had to move. Where should we have gone? Oh, it will be better now. Charlie has begun to make a little money; and once we get this place into shape! The whole crop will be ours—when we have a crop. And then, there is that trifle that will be coming to us from father's money. Say," she added suddenly, "there is something strange about that. I've been wanting to ask. Father deducted close to two thousand dollars from our share. Did he deduct anything from yours?"

"No."

"Well, can you understand it? There's a little over a hundred dollars, for instance, to Mr. Howden at Sedgeby. I don't understand it at all. And to John, over eight hundred dollars. Why should John get that much more?"

"Well," Cathleen said, hesitating, for John had told her about Frank's note, "that is the money John had to pay for Frank."

"But that was only two hundred dollars."

"No," Cathleen said. "If I remember right, it was four hundred in the first place; but it had run up tremendously before John even knew that he would have to pay it. And when it fell back on him, he could not pay it either for years."

Gladys sat silent. Her eyes were focused on infinity. Her face assumed that dispirited expression of hers. "Why didn't I know? Why didn't I know?"

"Ask Frank about it."

"Oh, I don't want to know! I don't want to know!"

About ten o'clock the two sisters went over to Isabel's place. Their father had not yet come down.

They helped Isabel to clean up and to arrange for his use the small north-east room which Mrs. Harvey had occupied.

Isabel worked like a man and was as ever. None of her children were at home. The big boys were away with their father, haying. The smallest had just started school.

When Isabel and Cathleen were alone for a mo-

ment, Isabel nudged her sister, with a toss of her short-haired head in the direction of the kitchen where Gladys was.

"I haven't much," she said. "Less than she. We're still renting. But father's welcome to what little I have. Of course, I'll acknowledge, I happen to have the larger house. You haven't seen Hennie yet, have you?"

"Not since the funeral."

"I suppose she'll be over this afternoon. Don't get scared when you see her. She dolls herself up. Wants to get married again. Rouge and powder and lipstick."

"Is that so?" Cathleen exclaimed.

Gladys entered behind their backs. "Is what so?"

"Oh," Isabel laughed, "we were talking of Hennie."

"Yes. I'll tell you something. Hennie's going the way mother went. She's getting stout. She's been short of breath for years. She walks just like mother. I don't think Hennie's to blame for all that people are blaming her for."

And suddenly she began to tell them about their mother.

When Isabel began to get dinner ready, she whispered to Cathleen, "You know, Gladys and Hennie have always been chums, from childhood up."

"Yes," Cathleen nodded. "It's only natural, isn't it? They were most nearly of an age. And so were we. And much as our paths have diverged, you've always been my favourite sister and still are."

Kenneth came home with his two oldest boys; all

three were sitting on top of a small load of hay which they drew to the barn.

"Father's stirring," Isabel said.

A few minutes later he came down. Isabel stood and watched his stiff, awkward movements as, walking backward, he descended the steep, narrow stairway; she held herself ready to lend a hand.

"Well, father," she sang out in her deep, throaty, and slightly hoarse voice, "we've put your room in shape. You won't have to climb that stairway any more."

He grunted.

"You missed your breakfast. We'll have dinner in a minute. Come and wash."

She spoke as to a child; and he obeyed.

When all the greetings were over and everybody was seated at the table, Kenneth addressed the assembly as was his custom, turning with a bland smile to Cathleen, Gladys, and his father-in-law. "Well, fellahs, make out your dinner. Wade in, now, wade in."

A glance was exchanged between Gladys and Cathleen.

John Elliot had his fit of abstraction. He took of the food what was offered to him. But he ignored Kenneth's repeated attempts at conversation.

Gladys winked at Kenneth. "He does not hear," she said.

The day was hot; and there was no shade anywhere except in a narrow strip north of the house. There, after the dinner dishes were washed, the three sisters

sat down on a bench. Kenneth joined them; the boys slunk off to the barn.

"Ken," Isabel said, "hadn't you better get out on the summerfallow?"

Gladys nudged Cathleen.

"Oah no!" he said with his lazy smile, pushing back his hat. "Too doggone hot! I'll wait till it's cooler; and then I'll pitch the hay off."

"I'll attend to the hay," Isabel insisted. "You know you are months behind with the plowing."

Again Gladys nudged Cathleen; and Cathleen understood that, were it not for her presence, there would be a quarrel.

Over Kenneth's handsome face a shadow had passed as the shadow of a cloud flits over a landscape. He threw his hat on the ground and, without answering, lay down in the grass.

Shortly after, the roar of a car on low gear, shooting up the hill behind the house, reached their ears.

"Hello!" Norman sang out when the car stopped close to the three women. "If the visitor doesn't come to me, I must come to the visitor."

Cathleen had risen. She went to the other side of the car where Henrietta was painfully lifting herself out of the seat.

Henrietta, all in black, huge, towering, with her clothes draped about her in a statuesque way, folded an enormous arm about her sister. "Well," she asked breathlessly, "how are you, dear?"

Cathleen looked at her, vastly surprised by the weird contrast of that face in its youthful make-up to the unwieldy body on which it sat. With an almost

coquettish jerk of her vast head Henrietta straightened the wide-brimmed hat on her hair.

Cathleen turned to Norman who, on the short-grass prairie surrounding the house, was dancing a jig, bursting with pent-up vitality. In spite of his thirty-two years he looked like a boy and as pretty as ever.

"Where's your wife?" Cathleen asked, extending her slender hand which he pumped up and down with exaggerated motions.

"How should I know?" he laughed. "Down at Faulknor. At the grain-growers' picnic, carrying on with young fellows."

Cathleen's face became serious. "Still as ever?"

"Sure. And I'm the same, too. I'm out for the day. Tomorrow I'll be out for the night. For a dance."

"But the children?"

"Oh," he cried airily. "They're all right. I get Tillie to stay with them. Ever seen Tillie? Ugly as night. But a good kid. A good enough kid!"

They returned into the shade of the house. Isabel had fetched the two chairs.

Kenneth rolled over in the grass and smiled up at his guests. "Still the same doggone weather, eh? Why don't you pray to the Lord to send us a little doggone rain once in a doggone while?"

"What's the use?" Norman said, sitting down; and his voice sounded exactly like John's. "What's the use?" When he repeated his words, he trumpeted them out just as John used to do, drowning all other voices; only that in his own voice laughter sounded

like a bugle call. "Well, where's the old gentleman? Still the same old crank?"

"Sh!" Isabel said. "I think he has lain down. He went to his room after dinner."

Henrietta was sitting exactly in front of the window of that room. She had recovered her breath and was arranging her veil.

Cathleen sat next to her; then Gladys, Norman, Isabel.

"Well," Cathleen said, "five of the remaining nine Elliot children are assembled once more. Only Mary, Margaret, John, and Henry are missing."

"By the way," Norman said, "I wish John would pay me the wages he owes me."

"Wages?" Isabel repeated.

"Yea!" Norman crowed. "He was a great hand at letting the other fellow do the work. He never paid me."

"Well," Isabel asked, half contemptuously, "I'd like to know how long you worked for John."

"I? A month."

Everybody laughed.

"Say," Henrietta said, nudging Cathleen, "I see you have not yet bobbed your hair. Why don't you?"

"Have you?" Cathleen asked with a smile.

"Sure. Shingled." And, with an awkward sweep of her fat, pudgy arm, she removed her hat. "Looks cute, doesn't it?"

Cathleen looked up with a peculiar note of surprise on her face.

"Don't you like it?" Henrietta asked irritably.

There was a moment's embarrassed silence.

Norman broke it noisily. "Hennie's looking for a new fellow." He laughed.

Cathleen gasped; for she thought this must be what, in the family jargon, used to be called a break.

But Henrietta took no offense. "Well," she said with a rising voice, "why shouldn't I, I'd like to know. Pete and I never did pull together. It came to the point where we couldn't see each other. We didn't speak any longer. Now he's dead and buried. What have I got out of life? At home I was always the Cinderella. I'm free at last. And I've got a little money!"

Cathleen thought of what Gladys had said of Henrietta; and, in the light of what she had, that very morning, heard of her mother's death, she felt greatly shaken.

"Yes," Henrietta went on, "I want to get some enjoyment out of life at last."

"Sure," Norman said, "sure!"

"That's, too, why I've begun to use powder—and—well," she laughed a breathless little laugh, "well, a little rouge, too. It improves my complexion, doesn't it?" And again she nudged Cathleen with her elbow.

"Well-l-l," Cathleen said very slowly, with a feeling as if she were asked to laugh in the presence of death.

Henrietta shot her a quick glance over her shoulder. "Maybe you don't approve of it?" she asked sharply.

"Oh, as far as that goes . . ."

"You don't use it, do you?"

"No."

"Well,"—very quickly, "why don't you?" And insistently, "Why don't you?"

Cathleen, feeling driven into a corner and resenting it, raised her head. The old animosity which, twenty, thirty years ago, the three younger sisters had harboured against Henrietta rose within her.

"In the circles," she said, "where I choose my friends, it is not considered the thing for an elderly woman either to bob her hair or to use paint. I do use a little powder."

"Oh," Henrietta puffed breathlessly, "in the circles where you choose your friends!" And, her old-time temper sweeping her away, she added, "Why don't you stay there, you snob? Why do you come to associate with such vulgar people as your own family?"

Side by side two sisters were sitting and hating each other, though both were in or beyond middle life.

Gladys had risen. "Hennie!" she said, touching her on the arm, and sat down by her side.

"Well," Henrietta added more placidly, "to tell you the honest truth, I use it because without it I look so downright ugly!"

"By the way," Norman changed the subject. "Now that money's been mentioned—why is it that one got seven thousand, and the other only five?"

"That is all explained," Gladys said, anxious to avoid the question. "I'll tell you some day."

"Well-l-l," Norman went on. "All right, then. But why did he have to put the money in trust so we can't touch it till after his death?"

"Probably he wanted to make sure that he'd have some cash of his own," Isabel said.

"What does he need any cash for, now he's living with his children?"

"Sh!" Isabel pointed to the window.

"He won't hear," Kenneth smiled. "He's so dog-gone deaf." He pronounced it "deef."

"Well," Norman went on, laughing as if he were saying all this for the fun of scandalising his sister Cathleen of whom he was proud and whom he admired. "I don't care. But I had to pay a dirty Jew a dickens of a rake-off in order to get the cash."

A gasp went through the line. Even Henrietta forgot her wrath. Gladys who was sitting by her side bent forward.

"Norman!" she said. "Do you mean to say you've got the money?"

"Sure. That is, I signed away interest and capital and got four thousand nine hundred instead of seven thousand."

Four pairs of eyes were focused on him.

Only Gladys looked straight ahead. "So it can be done! It can be done!"

At last Cathleen spoke. "What did you do with the money? Did you pay it in on your farm?"

"Shoot!" Norman cried. "What do you take me for? A fool? No, sir! First of all I bought that little car. The balance I've put in the bank. Joint account for Dorothy and myself. It'll last a long while yet."

"Well," Henrietta gasped, "that beats everything I've ever heard! But what I can't understand is why

Henry should have had his share as well as the rest of us. He doesn't need it. He's taken care of in that asylum in Brandon."

"Not at all," Cathleen objected. "If his board is not paid, he is a public charge."

"Why shouldn't he be?" Henrietta asked testily. "What have we got such institutions for? What do we pay taxes for, I'd like to know."

"So far John and I have been paying for him," Cathleen said. "We won't need to now."

"John?" Norman asked. "But anyway, what are we talking about? We all apparently wanted the money, or we shouldn't have accepted it as we did and waived all legal recourse. We've even consented to let the farm with all chattels go to public funds."

And thus the conversation went on for a while.

"You'll find him quite a burden," Henrietta said at last to Isabel.

"Well," Isabel agreed, "yes. But we are not going to make the mistake again which we made with old Mrs. Harvey. He is not going to have his own will. When we want to go out, he is going to come along. The old lady thought it her right to stay at home; and since she could not be left alone, we had to stay at home, too. We have learned our lesson."

"Well, say," Norman asked, "isn't it about time that we paid our court to the old man?"

"Wait till half past three," Isabel said. "He is probably sleeping."

"All right. All right. Let him have his sleep, of course!"

It was past four o'clock when at last they went to the front of the house.

Over the hill to the west the children were coming home from school: two big boys, Isabel's second twins, a girl of eleven, and the little boy, Phil.

"For goodness' sake!" Isabel exclaimed, "there are the children already!"

She entered the kitchen and, from the kitchen, the south-east room which she and her husband occupied. Her father's room was accessible only through it.

She knocked at his door, but received no answer.

She knocked again; and then, with a sudden premonition of something being wrong, she entered quickly.

A moment later she rejoined the group at the door of the house. Her face was white.

"Father's gone!" she said.

CHAPTER XVI

A LAST EMOTION AND A PILGRIMAGE

JOHN ELLIOT, right after dinner, had entered the room which his daughters had arranged for him. Along the north wall stood an old, battered iron bedstead, with the window over its foot. It was close and hot. He tried to raise the sash; but, after it had yielded an inch or so, it caught and stuck fast in its frame.

He lay down on the bed. It was very hard. He rose and investigated and found that, instead of a spring mattress, there were only boards under the bedding.

He grunted ill-humouredly.

His thought was at Sedgeby. That thought was perfectly lucid. He knew where he was; and he knew that the house on his farm was vacant.

He had been kidnapped. When he had started from the city, he had had no intention of going to Faulknor. His destination had been Sedgeby. But his daughter had accompanied him; and he had come to the conclusion that he could not escape her. She had led him here, a captive.

In his vision of the house at Sedgeby, there was only one flaw. He saw it as it had been twenty years ago: the floors well scrubbed to perfect whiteness, the walls well papered, all the rooms well furnished,

the beds made up and inviting to rest. He wished he were there.

Once more he lay down; and once more he rose.

It was hot. But a light breeze entered through the crack of the window. He took the single pillow and threw it under that crack; and for the third time he lay down.

Perhaps he dozed. But gradually, during his wakeful moments, the illusion that he was in his own house became so strong that he stirred repeatedly as if to rise again. All sorts of things occurred to him which needed attending to. A halter-shank had to be spliced; it had worn through where it rubbed on the manger. A plow-share was loose on the second bottom of the gang-plow. The rail of the slide-door in the north wall of the barn had sagged. The cement floor of the pig pen was cracked by last winter's frost.

Suddenly, with a start, he became aware of voices close by.

At first they blended with his visions.

Norman's voice—then that of a stranger. No. It was Henrietta's.

And thus, by a series of steps, his consciousness was brought back to the immediate present. At moments he listened; at others, he reflected.

His reflections were brief; they were mere repetitions of former thoughts.

His first dream had been . . . And his second dream . . .

And neither mattered; he had grown beyond them. He stood at the gateway into another world.

Once he had longed to be where five of his children

were; there were five of them out there, in the shade of the house! But they were of this world upon which he had turned his back.

And Henry? Henry was at Brandon. Doing what?

At any rate, he had given his children all that he had. And now he was useless, utterly useless. Nothing remained to be done in this life.

Into the placid and yet painful flow of these thoughts drifted scraps of conversation, like leaves borne by autumn breezes, down to the surface of some sluggish water.

Norman revealed himself; so did Henrietta. Already, during his father's lifetime, the boy was squandering his inheritance. They criticised him, their father, for his actions!

Those whom he had helped to an independence were strangers to him: Cathleen, Margaret, Arthur. The rest disapproved of him: Gladys, Norman, Henrietta, and even Isabel.

And Henry, at Brandon, was in the asylum for the insane!

No. This was not his world any longer. He had nothing to do with it.

And all the time, behind this complex of thoughts, made up of his own reflections and of the associations induced by what he heard, there remained the vision of the empty house between the hills of Sedgeby—as it had been twenty years ago, at the time when Martha, his wife, had been living. It was true, it had been left by all who then filled it, even by him!

But, as alternately despair, indignation, and acute pain seemed to seize him, an overpowering homesickness invaded him with an almost physical longing. Everything about him here was distasteful: everything was chaos. There, in that house, lived order and repose.

He had wanted to go there; he was going to go there now. He wanted to go home . . . *home!*

He felt strong and well: he felt almost young again at the thought of the house he had built, never doubting that one day his oldest son would live there: an Elliot of the Elliots of Sedgeby, his son, John Elliot the third!

He focused his whole mind on that idea: home!

He *must* go home!

And suddenly his attitude towards his children was changed.

He had heard "them" say that he could not be left alone.

"They" would not let him go.

"They" were his enemies; "they" were his jailers. Since he had left that home, he had not been his own master. Why had he left it?

He must escape from his captivity!

He rose.

With a sort of crafty foresight he opened his suitcase and rummaged about in it till he found a pair of spare socks. He examined his feet; they were shod with stout, square-toed shoes, serviceable enough. He looked for his cane.

Then he tiptoed to the door and listened. Not a

sound in the house. "They" were all behind it, in the narrow strip of shade.

He opened the door and tiptoed through the next room. Again he stopped and listened. His lustreless, grey eyes, overhung by white, bushy brows, were almost closed with the intensity of lending ear.

He entered the kitchen and crossed it quickly.

At the outside door, he stopped again, for a last time.

A moment later, leaning on his cane to support his tottering steps, he was hurrying down the hillside. At his foot, in the valley, lay a slough still filled with water. He had to make a wide detour through the mangy oat-field. Then he turned west.

His progress was slow; he was too greatly excited. His lips trembled; his snow-white beard, slightly yellow under the nose, betrayed that his cheeks were twitching. Since it had not been trimmed for a long while, it surrounded the lower part of his head with a bristling hemisphere.

As he went on, first through the field, then following a fold in the hills, a draw he saw, after half a mile or so, a schoolhouse ahead. Instinctively he swerved to the north. This brought him to the top of a bare hill whence he could see, right opposite, the house which he had left. He was slightly north of it; and he could plainly make out, less than a mile away, the line of figures which consisted of five of his children.

He made use of every fold in the ground, of every low, creeping thicket of snowberry interspersing the prairie. He avoided the road and gave a farm house

a wide berth. His tremendous excitement which made his slow pulse pound, while it retarded his progress, supported his strength.

He kept a sharp look-out all around. He saw when the flag was lowered at the school and avoided the trails all the more.

On and on he struggled; and, after another two hours or so, he found himself suddenly on the brow of a steep ravine. At its bottom a small river wound its way. All about, amphitheatrically, bare clay cliffs sank down to its bed, washed by rare rains into myriads of gullies which all led down, down, unscalably steep.

For a moment he stood baffled. Then, with shaking hands, he drew his watch. It was six o'clock. He thought he could not be far now from Sedgeby. With the help of a sort of homing instinct he had struck almost a bee-line to his farm. Yet, in reality, he had covered no more than four miles out of roughly a hundred.

Half a mile to the north he saw a deeper gully which led down and which was filled with shrubs and small trees. He set out for that goal.

The going, what with gopher and badger holes, was exceedingly rough. It took him an hour to reach the descent. But, when he got there, he lost no time and began at once, holding on to the stems of the tangle of chokecherry, saskatoon, and poplar, to climb down.

Within another half hour he stood on the bank of the little river. To his left, it merrily rippled over a gravelly bar.

He felt that this was as far as he could go that day.

He would spend the night under the trees. But the river was an obstacle; he must cross it before he rested. At last he sat down, removed his shoes and socks, and stripped his trousers up over his bony, hairy legs. Thus he forded the river at the bar.

On the west bank he found a wide flood-plain, overgrown with dense and almost impenetrable thickets of willow. These afforded vast chambers vaulted with foliage. He knelt and scraped the dust-coated leaves of last year together in order to prepare a bed for himself. It was nearly eight o'clock; the sun was sinking.

In the last, ruddy light of the day that was past he went down to the water's edge and washed his socks. The water had wonderfully refreshed him as he had forded it.

Then he lay down, supperless, covered with his coat which he had taken off. Almost instantly he fell asleep.

During the night he awoke many times; but he did not feel cold. It was the end of July.

Towards morning, when he lay awake, a strange feeling came over him. By his side lay Martha, his wife; he felt her arm on shoulder and breast: the way she had often placed it when she wished to be near him. He lay very still.

But, as dawn broke, he saw where he was; and a tremendous grief sent dry sobs into his throat.

At last he sat up, greatly sobered.

He tried to think. He knew he was far from Sedgeby. To Sedgeby it was a hundred miles or more. North of where he was, the main line of the railroad

led west; it could not be more than fifty, sixty miles away. Perhaps, if he struck north . . .

No. "They" would get hold of him there. He would be a prisoner once more. He wanted to get home, to Martha, his wife.

He took the small leather pouch from his pocket in which he carried his money. He counted it over and over. He had a hundred and six dollars and twenty-four cents.

Then he rose and shouldered into his coat, feeling weak and tired from yesterday's unwonted excitement and exertion. He wondered whether he could make the remaining distance that day?

Home! Martha!

He was weary of wandering.

But he carefully took his direction and struck out, leaning on his cane.

He had walked for an hour over open prairie and through a field or two, crawling through fences, before he realised that he was very hungry. He had just struck a road or rather a trail and was following it up a bare hillside. He remained on it from weariness, in spite of his instinctive dread of the highways of man.

It was hard to climb. Behind him, the sun had risen.

When he came to the shoulder of the hill, the trail took a sudden turn; and as he followed it, he found himself face to face with a woman at a well. Beyond the well, as he stopped, bent over his cane, he saw the sod-hut and the straggling low buildings of a pioneer homestead.

He coughed. "I wonder," he said, "whether you could let me have breakfast?" His own voice startled him; it sounded strange and cavernous—like the echo of a voice he had known.

The woman laughed. "You did give me a turn. I guess so. Come to the house." And she led the way.

In the single room of the hut, the air was full of smoke. A half naked child was playing on the earthen floor.

The woman placed a chair for him and turned to the stove. "Where do you come from?"

"Eh?" Instinctively he adopted a policy of concealment.

"Never mind!" she shouted, thinking him deaf.

He fumbled in his pocket and drew his leather pouch, taking from it a fifty-cent piece which he placed on the edge of the table.

"Oh, that's too much," said the woman; but she took it.

He sat and rested, leaning his bearded chin on the crook of his cane. Then he ate and drank. There was no butter; but there were preserves of wild berries.

"My man's away haying," the woman shouted. "Or he might take you. Going to town?"

He nodded. Before he rose, he took a few slices of bread and put them in his pocket.

"Take it all," the woman shouted. "You've paid for it."

Again he followed the road. A wide valley opened before him. In its centre, along a line of steel, lay a town.

Towns he must avoid. He crawled through a fence and struck out toward the north-west. Without knowing it, he thus shortened his road by following diagonals.

That night, having passed the town, with many rests in between, and having consumed, slowly munching it, all the bread in his pockets and drunk from an alkaline slough, he slept under a concrete culvert bridging a gully.

Again, as soon as darkness had come, he succumbed to the hallucination of his home; he was lying in bed with his wife, Martha, by his side. Again, with the morning, came the heart-rending disappointment of the reality.

That day, the third of his wanderings, he lost his fear of the road, though he still avoided the towns. He passed a few farms on which cutting had begun; and he was seen by many people. He even went into the yards and bought bread and milk. He was now too far from Faulknor for oral intelligence of the search that was being made to have reached the district. In harvest time it is nothing unusual, contrary to western customs, to see a man travelling afoot. And he was far from the beaten track.

Had he known it, he might have indulged in that peculiar mood which had lately been so familiar to him: the enjoyment of an invisible presence at happenings which concerned him closely. For, in the western metropolis the daily papers bristled with head-lines saying, "Noted Pioneer of Western Province Mysteriously Disappeared. Search Being Kept up along all Railroad Lines. Posse Scouring the

Faulknor District in Saskatchewan." His picture was printed covering two columns. But nobody would have recognised him from that likeness, for it had been made from a photograph taken more than thirty years ago. "Relatives of the Missing Man Offer Reward of Five Hundred Dollars for Information as to His Whereabouts."

But John Elliot was all unconscious of the stir he was making in the world; and daily papers did not penetrate into these remote neighbourhoods.

Day after day he struggled on through pioneer settlements. Day after day he covered three, four miles of road, guided by his instinct and a sense of direction which kept him to a north-west line.

The nights he spent in wheat stooks, little thickets, deserted buildings. His food he bought in cross-roads stores or on lonely farms.

And, as week after week went by, he covered less and less ground in a day, for he grew weaker and weaker. But a vision held him to the task. He was now firmly convinced that he needed only to get "home" in order to find Martha, his wife, as she had been many, many years ago.

At last, one day, early in the morning, he seemed to be struck by some features in the landscape which looked familiar. Prickly Pear cactus grew in clusters on the bare, rolling hills. Stones of the kind that he had plowed out of his fields, covered with rust-coloured lichen, abounded.

He stopped and looked about with dim eyes. Yes, this was the Sedgeby landscape!

Half a mile ahead, a binder whirled through the bronzed air of August.

He struggled on. Bent and conquered by the exertions of the last few weeks, he looked like a centenarian; he looked like Ahasuerus who could not die.

When he came to the edge of the field, he sat down on a stone to wait for the man who was riding the binder.

The reaper approached; and, struck by the appearance of this old, old man, he left his horses and walked across the intervening stubble.

Out of his hairy face John Elliot looked up at him.

"Where is Sedgeby?" he asked with his cavernous voice.

"Four miles east, eight miles north."

East! So he had gone too far. "Straight north?"

"Straight north. You want to get there?"

He shook his head. Then, from sheer exhaustion, he gave his secret away. "The Elliot farm, four miles south of town."

"Oh," said the stranger. "Yes. I know the Elliot farm. I trade at Sedgeby. In the hollow. Just south of the big hill."

John Elliot nodded.

"But there's nobody living there."

"My wife," John Elliot said. "She lives there."

The other looked at him and mused. "Tell you," he said at last. "The Elliot place is eight miles from here. If you want to get there, I'll give you a ride half the way. I live at the corner where you turn north. But I've got to finish here. Two, three more rounds. If you care to wait, I figure on getting home

for dinner. I want to start cutting on the home place this afternoon."

John Elliot nodded.

"See the wagon over there, by the road? Well, you go and sit down."

Thus, after having sparingly partaken of the meal offered at the farm, John Elliot set out, in the early afternoon, on his last four-mile tramp.

The nearer he came to the place, the more familiar did the landscape become. But his progress was slow. It took him two hours to cover a mile; and when night fell—a star-spangled night, cool and crisp—he was only halfway between the former Harvey place and his own. But he did not stop, for every inch of ground was familiar now.

On and on he went through the dark, expecting any moment to see a light in his house. He was skirting the field now which had been his own; and still no light shone.

And then he stood at the gate and saw the house looming darkly in the light of the stars.

Hardly able any longer to support himself, with one hand holding to the gate-post, he fumbled with the other at the wire that held the gate shut. Already the catch that had held it was broken.

When the gate opened, he stumbled and fell in.

There had been a path leading up to the house, through the front yard, set with shrubs of small-fruit. The whole slope was a tangle now of sere, ripe weeds in which the shrubs lay embedded. A slight breeze rustled in the brittle leaves of the poplars which

Martha, his wife, had planted many, many years ago.

Unable to rise, he crawled forward on hands and knees. Thus he reached the house. Slowly and carefully, but without pain, he raised himself to his feet and groped for the door-knob. The knob was not there. But the door yielded; it was idly swinging on its hinges.

He felt for the step and lifted himself into the frame. Then he groped forward till he reached the door to the stairway. That door was nailed up.

"Martha!" he called; and again, "Martha!"

Nobody answered; nobody heard.

At last, with a sudden return of memory, accompanied by a dry sob, he turned to his right and found the door to the former dining room. There, he felt about till he touched his bed. For a moment he stood as if listening. A draught of the breeze struck his bare head. Where did that breeze come from?

Then, with a giving way of all his faculties, he fell forward on his bed.

Next morning, at dawn, young Carroll found him. The fact that the small gate in front of the house was open had aroused his suspicions.

Young Carroll was aware of the fact that John Elliot had been missing from Faulknor; weeks ago, a telegram had reached his father, enquiring whether he was there.

He did what he could. He placed the old man who was alive and even conscious but completely inert and indifferent on the bed and hurried home to tell his

father. His father went to town and sent a telegram to Faulknor.

In the early afternoon Woodrow Ormond—who, under the circumstances, had given up his trip to California—came driving over with his wife, Cathleen, bringing Isabel and Gladys.

They were horrified when they saw the house. The windows were broken without any exception. The greater part of the floor had been torn up. Black spots on the prairie about the house, covered with charcoal, were evidence of the fact that camp-fires had been lit there, no doubt by travelling harvesters. The room in which their father lay was open to the winds; and everything in it was coated with dust and chaff. The bed on which he reposed showed marks that it had been slept in by men who had not even thought it worth their while to remove their mud-coated shoes.

Isabel, practical-minded, at once fell to work cleaning up. She sent Woodrow to town and broke the door to the stairway open, to find clean linen in the closets above. Thus a measure of comfort was given to the dying man.

When young Carroll came home from the field, Cathleen went out and asked despondently, "How is it possible that the house should be in such shape?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "An unoccupied house soon goes to ruin."

John Elliot refused all food. After dark, a young doctor arrived from the nearby little city.

On the following day, Norman and Henrietta came

in Norman's car; John and Margaret arrived by train.

All of them found their father still living. His lips were in continual though silent motion. But no sound could be heard.

At midnight he died.

When all those of his children who were in the house had assembled, they looked mutely down on his stern, cold face; and in most of them a feeling rose to the surface that with him the last link had been broken which so far had held the many divergent forces at work within the family together as in a sheaf. Henceforth, their eyes would be focused on their own, individual futures.

But, once more, all but two of John Elliot's family had been assembled.



